

Consumer scepticism towards corporate social responsibility:

The case of Generation Z in the UK

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Abstract

Attempts have been made to investigate the drivers of scepticism towards corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, the results are inconclusive and inconsistent. Consequently, some scholars have called for investigations into additional drivers of CSR scepticism. To date, there has been no research on CSR scepticism among Generation Z (Gen Z) in the UK, though related studies have focused heavily on consumer scepticism towards cause-related marketing, one dimension of CSR. Thus, the current study is the first to investigate consumer scepticism towards an underexplored dimension of CSR (socially responsible business practices) among Gen Z in the UK. Qualitative data were collected using face-to-face and online open-ended semi-structured interviews with 35 Gen Z respondents in the UK. The sample was recruited using the snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Data were then analysed using NVivo software.

The study revealed numerous factors influencing scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. These concepts include lack of evidence, impacts, multiple cues that indicate brands and retailers are socially responsible, the transparency of the initiatives, the reputation of the brand/retailer, the size of the brand/retailer and the scale of their activities, how brands and retailers present themselves and their history of socially responsible behaviour. Some potential factors that might not necessarily lead to scepticism were also found. The finding also indicated that perceptions and evaluations of information type and credibility could impact scepticism towards information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Additionally, this study noted that scepticism is not a permanent state of mind but is associated with the disbelief in information-related factors, moving beyond previously investigated contexts.

Different levels of scepticism among members of Gen Z were reflected through the attribution of motive(s) behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Unlike past studies, this study provided insights into the causal structure of consumer attribution of motives behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, making an important contribution to theory-building in the CSR scepticism domain. For the first time, through the investigation of factors influencing trust, the study unveiled the potential factors influencing scepticism and uncovered consumers' information processing behaviours which corresponded to different levels of scepticism among the interviewed members of Gen Z. Practically, the study offers implications for (1) brands, manufacturers and retailers regarding CSR practices and communications and (2) governing bodies and policymakers.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is to provide the background of the study, present the research problems and gaps, introduce the research aim and objectives and outline the research questions. The research setting for the current study will also be discussed.

1.2 Background of the study and research problems

CSR communications are often associated with marketing objectives that aim at changing and improving some or all of the following: brand awareness and companies' public image, reputation, market position, competitive advantages, consumer perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, consumer-company identification, loyalty and consumer satisfaction (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Öberseder et al., 2013; Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009; Saeidi et al., 2015; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009). Subsequently, they are highly expected to lead to better financial performance (Rodriguez-Fernandez, 2016), enhancing firms' human resources (resulting in greater productivity) and marketing functions (Graafland & Mazereeuw-Van der Duijn Schouten, 2012; Hou & Reber, 2011; Murphy & Schlegelmilch, 2013). Because the implementation of CSR practices could bring many potential benefits, they have been adopted by numerous firms. However, the underlying motivation could be perceived differently from a consumer's perspective. Indeed, it is very likely that consumers express scepticism towards the motives behind CSR practices and could even consider them to be firm-serving motives (Foreh & Grier, 2003). Scepticism has been referred to as both disbelief and distrust towards marketers' claims and motives (Foreh & Grier, 2003).

Consumer scepticism has been growing (Moreno & Kang, 2019; Thomas & Kureshi, 2020) across industries and sectors, including financial services (Galletley, 2018), tourism (Yeoman et al., 2007), beauty (Fisher, 2018), food (Parkes, 2018), food services (Caddy, 2018) and retail (Baram, 2018). Recent studies show that CSR scepticism is increasing (Chen & Chiu, 2018; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). CSR scepticism questions whether companies participate in CSR activities for profit-based interests (firm-serving) or societal well-being (public-serving; Foreh & Grier, 2003). CSR scepticism varies among consumers (Elving, 2012; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Joireman et al., 2018; Mantovani et al., 2017; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Zhang & Hanks, 2017) and depends on various factors such as the perceived fit (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006); the execution forms including the type of claims (verbal versus numerical), use of language, quantification of claims and the level of verbiage (Joireman et al., 2018);

history of CSR involvement (Schmeltz, 2012; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009); a combination of consumer attributions (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014); and the need for cognition, processing fluency and mood (Zhang & Hanks, 2017). Research to date on CSR scepticism has identified various factors that influence consumer's scepticism development towards CSR. However, the findings are mixed and inconsistent. For example, Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013) indicate that egoistic and stakeholder-driven attributions contribute to the development of CSR scepticism. In contrast, Skarmeas et al. (2014) state that some individual attributions such as egoistic and values-driven are necessary but not enough to promote or deter CSR scepticism. Moreover, Skarmeas et al. (2014) find that the presence of stakeholder-driven motives is not necessary for the development of high CSR scepticism, which is somewhat inconsistent with the results discussed by Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013).

Similarly, Chen and Chiu's study (2018) shows no support for the hypothesis that stakeholder-driven motives are positively related to CSR scepticism, which is also inconsistent with Skarmeas and Leonidou's study (2013). Due to the inconsistencies and conflicting results regarding how consumer attributions contribute to the development of CSR scepticism, the researcher anticipated the need for further investigation of consumer attributions leading to the development of CSR scepticism. In addition, in these studies of consumer attributions leading to CSR scepticism, it is not clear how people arrive at the attributions of CSR motives that may or may not lead to CSR scepticism. Scholars have investigated how consumer attributions lead to scepticism (e.g. Chen & Chiu, 2018; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014); however, few have paid attention to the sources of consumer attributions (Marin et al., 2015, as cited Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Yoon et al., 2006, as cited in Marin et al., 2015). Thus, the current study investigates consumer CSR attributions to understand CSR scepticism.

Many previous consumer behaviour studies have focused on scepticism and its effects on consumer attitudes and behavioural responses (Albayrak et al., 2013; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Chen & Chiu, 2018; De Vries et al., 2015; Elving, 2012; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Goh & Balaji, 2016; Joireman et al., 2018; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Mantovani et al., 2017; Rim & Kim, 2016; Romani et al., 2016; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Theofilou & Jerofejeva, 2010), which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter. However, instead of focusing on scepticism and consumer behavioural responses, scholars generally agree that it is vital to learn about the drivers of consumer scepticism

(Zhang & Hanks, 2017). As a result, brands and retailers may learn to act more responsibly in terms of business approaches and be better in designing communications with consumers, who will consequently perceive CSR initiatives as the desired tendency. CSR scepticism is an underexplored topic (Chen & Chiu, 2018; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013), and a limited range of drivers of CSR scepticism have been uncovered to date (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). As a result, several research directions have been suggested for future studies on the topic of CSR scepticism (Ellen et al., 2006; Elving, 2012; Mantovani et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2009; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Zhang & Hanks, 2017). This study aims to fill this gap by investigating additional drivers of scepticism.

The majority of prior research is quantitative, most often taking place in the US and primarily emphasising:

- Consumer scepticism towards advertising claims and cause-related marketing.
- The relationship between consumer scepticism and consumer responses.

It is essential to note that cause-related marketing is only one of the dimensions of CSR (Abitbol et al., 2018; Anuar & Mohamad, 2012; Kotler & Lee, 2005; Mercadé-Melé et al., 2017). Hence, there is a knowledge gap about scepticism towards other forms of CSR initiatives such as corporate social marketing, cause promotion, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering and socially responsible business practices (Kotler & Lee, 2005). In addition, Rim and Kim (2016) suggest that CSR scepticism is very different from scepticism towards other targets that have been investigated. Investigating this topic will help enhance our knowledge of consumer scepticism about other forms of CSR initiatives. In the scope of this study, the emphasis is placed on socially responsible practices with a focus on the use of reduced and recyclable plastic packaging among brands and retailers in the UK (see section 1.5 for discussions of the research setting and plastic packaging recycling industry).

Attempts have been made to investigate CSR scepticism in different cultural contexts, mainly among Western cultures (see **Table 2.4**). Cross-cultural research, however, suggests that the attribution process differs across age groups and cultures (Thakor & Goneau-Lessard, 2009; Yoon et al., 2006). In addition, social responsibility is perceived, understood and accessed differently in various locations and timeframes and among distinct populations (Daft & Marcic, 2011; Zhou et al., 2015). Moreover, individuals are different ‘in the extent to which they are sceptical’ (De Vries et al., 2015, p.144).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that different audiences have varying interests, information needs and expectations of companies; thus, their responses vary depending on the communication channels available (Dawkins, 2004; Kim & Ferguson, 2014). Following this novel discovery, this current study focuses on consumer scepticism among a specific cohort, Gen Z.

Gen Z individuals have more powerful influences than previous generations to re-define production and consumption (Priporas et al., 2017). They are chosen for the current study as ‘there is a dearth of empirical studies’ about Gen Z in the marketing field (Priporas et al., 2017, p. 2; Priporas, 2020; Priporas et al., 2020b). In a study on millennials, Schmeltz (2012) states that different generation traits and media habits among young consumers affect the preference for CSR actions and CSR communication. Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010 - Francis & Hoefel, 2018), is different from older generations (Parker & Igielnik, 2020), meaning that companies have a lower understanding of the CSR actions and communications preferred by these young consumers. Having grown up with almost unlimited access to information, Generation Z has very different media habits and consumptions, potentially leading to different evaluations of CSR initiatives performed by firms (Agrawal, 2017; Granados, 2017). Generation Z’s lifestyle preferences and purchasing culture are very different from previous generations (Özkan, 2017). To date, however, there is no research on CSR scepticism among Generation Z in the UK, and the current study fills this gap.

Regarding national context, each country has different political, economic and social contexts that can reflect the institutional capacity to promote and support CSR initiatives (Baughn et al., 2007). Companies across different regions prioritise different aspects of CSR (Welford, 2004, 2005). Similarly, Ortas et al. (2015) indicate that, in terms of CSR, companies in diverse countries adopt distinct managerial approaches, implement various choices and weigh business objectives differently. Relatively, Gjølborg (2009) explains that the nationality of the company does influence the company’s CSR practices and performance. More importantly, socially responsible behaviour is defined differently among individuals (Armstrong & Green, 2013) and people are unequally sceptical (De Vries et al., 2015). Hence, an investigation of CSR scepticism beyond the often-studied context of the US is needed. The UK is one of the world’s largest leading economies (Boumphrey, 2010; Harari, 2016; Lee, 2021; PWC, 2015). Despite its size, only one study – conducted by Theofilou and Jerofejeva (2010) from Bournemouth University, using a mixed-method approach – has looked at the effect of CSR scepticism on the studied

population's evaluations and behaviours towards a company's CSR actions. Hence, the UK is chosen as the setting for this study.

In terms of theory, scholars have suggested using attribution theory to explore consumer scepticism in the CSR context (Goh & Balaji, 2016; Yoon et al., 2006). However, it reports that there is a lack of literature on consumer scepticism towards CSR via attribution theory (Chen & Chiu, 2018).

Building upon attribution theory, Chen and Chiu (2018) have followed Ellen et al.'s work (2006) on categories of consumer attributions and investigated CSR scepticism among the chosen study population. Skarmeas and Leonidou's study (2013) is based on the attribution theory developed by Kelley and Michela (1980) and Weiner (2000). Leonidou and Skarmeas's study (2017) has been conducted based on Kelley's attribution theory (1973). Further, Foreh and Grier's work (2003) relies on the attribution theories of Jones and Davis (1965), Kelley (1967, 1972) and Nisbett and Ross (1980). Yoon et al.'s research (2006) builds upon the fundamental attribution error of attribution research. These modern attribution theories (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Kelley, 1967; Jones & Davis, 1965; Weiner, 1974) develop a consistent but 'incomplete model of the way an individual makes sense of the world' (Crittenden, 1983, p. 426). Moreover, most studies have used attribution theory to describe an object or a person's perceptions, not the causal attribution processes the theory is concerned (Mizerski et al., 1979).

According to Crittenden (1983), attribution theories are a collection of different attributional theories, including Heider's (1958) attribution theory, Jones and Davis's correspondent inference theory (1965), Kelley's covariation model (1967) and Weiner's cognitive theory of motivation (1974). Attributions are prone to influence and biases (Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009b). Hence, Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) suggest that future research could build on attribution theory to explore the influences of attributional biases (actor-observer bias, self-serving bias), error (fundamental attribution error) and principles (discounting, augmentation) on how consumers make different causal inferences. The current study, therefore, investigates the process behind consumers' attributions in light of attribution theory and the discounting principle.

1.3 Research questions

CSR has become increasingly important in global business operations (Ghoneim, 2019; Keys et al., 2009; Rangan et al., 2015). However, CSR scepticism is on the rise (Chen & Chiu, 2018; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013) and has become an issue for many businesses.

Consumer socialisation can be a meaningful antecedent to both dispositional and situational CSR scepticism (Ham & Kim, 2020, p. 9), a topic of concern in the digital era. With an unlimited supply of information, young consumers learn to be sceptical through social interactions with mass media, peers and parents, among others (Mangleburg & Bristol, 1998; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000).

The current study is guided by two research questions:

- **Research question 1 (RQ1):** How does Generation Z in the UK perceive and evaluate the CSR initiatives of brands, manufacturers and retailers?

The first research question aims to understand the perceptions and evaluations of CSR initiatives such as plastic packaging recycling among members of Generation Z in the UK. Many UK consumers try to behave in a way that is less harmful to the environment around them, and many prefer to boycott unethical brands (Salazar, 2020). Being ethical and engaging in sustainable behaviour has grown desirable among consumers (Baram, 2020). In comparison to other generations, Generation Z has more individuals who would pay 20% more for ethical products (Sabanoglu, 2018). Thus, CSR practices can be crucial for brands and retailers' success, differentiation and competitive advantage (Mintel, 2020; Valet, 2019).

In today's connected world, brands and retailers have more innovative and efficient platforms to connect with their customers beyond borders. While digital connectivity allows instant access, it is reported that Gen Z (1,000 individuals aged 12–19) in the UK spend much of their time online. They often worry that the news stories they see online are not true (Duckett, 2019). Regarding social media, many consumers trust posts from friends over posts from companies (Euromonitor, 2017b). Many (among 1,000 Gen Z individuals aged 12–19) in the UK said they do not believe or are unsure whether to be suspicious when companies say they are environmentally friendly (Baram, 2020).

The first research question evolved from the issues discussed above as an attempt to understand whether Gen Z individuals trust brands and retailers that say they are socially responsible. It also seeks to uncover whether members of Gen Z are sceptical of the information coming from specific communication platforms or sources.

- **Research question 2 (RQ2):** What potential factors influence CSR scepticism among Generation Z in the UK?

The second research question is a response to calls from scholars regarding drivers of scepticism. The investigation addresses the inconsistencies among the findings of drivers of scepticism in previous studies. Unlike other generations, social media has always been part of Generation Z's life (Alsop, 2015). However, after surveying 3,000 Generation Z individuals in ten countries, a press release from Deloitte shows that Generation Z has no trust in social media (Malysa, 2019). The question is, why are they unable to develop trust? Thus, understanding why people do not trust something can reveal the potential factors that influence their scepticism or distrust, which underpins the second research question. The second research question builds upon the first to investigate what makes Generation Z sceptical of CSR claims among brands, manufacturers and retailers.

1.4 Aims and objectives

Due to the limited research on CSR scepticism towards other dimensions of CSR, CSR scepticism among Generation Z and CSR scepticism research from a UK perspective (discussed earlier), this project explores consumer scepticism towards CSR among Generation Z in the UK. In doing so, it enhances our knowledge and understanding of Generation Z's perceptions and evaluations of different dimensions of an overlooked area among CSR initiatives.

Due to limited knowledge regarding the drivers of CSR scepticism, calls have been made for further investigations. Thus, the study also researches the potential factors contributing to CSR scepticism among the chosen population. This approach addresses the inconsistency and inconclusive results from past studies into drivers of CSR scepticism. It is also necessary to explore the drivers of consumer scepticism towards CSR from a marketing perspective because genuine intentions need to be perceived accordingly. More importantly, how consumers perceive CSR initiatives and the motives behind them potentially influence their behaviours. The current study has the two following objectives:

- **Research objective 1 (RO1):** To explore Generation Z's perceptions and evaluations to understand whether they are sceptical towards brands and retailers' CSR initiatives.
- **Research objective 2 (RO2):** To identify factors that influence the development of CSR scepticism among Generation Z in the UK.

1.5 The research setting

The current study focuses on plastic packaging recycling among brands and retailers as a socially responsible initiative. The primary role of packaging is to protect contents and deliver products to consumers in perfect condition (Dussimon, 2017; Consumer Goods Forum, 2008). Among many communication tools, packaging is one of the options brands and marketers have to display information. Packaging is designed to attract consumers' attention, to create distinctive positive associations towards brands and to differentiate them from competitors to further create values for consumers (Chandon, 2013). Therefore, packaging can be considered an important marketing tool to promote products and communicate CSR initiatives to influence positive brand image and prompt favourable consumer responses.

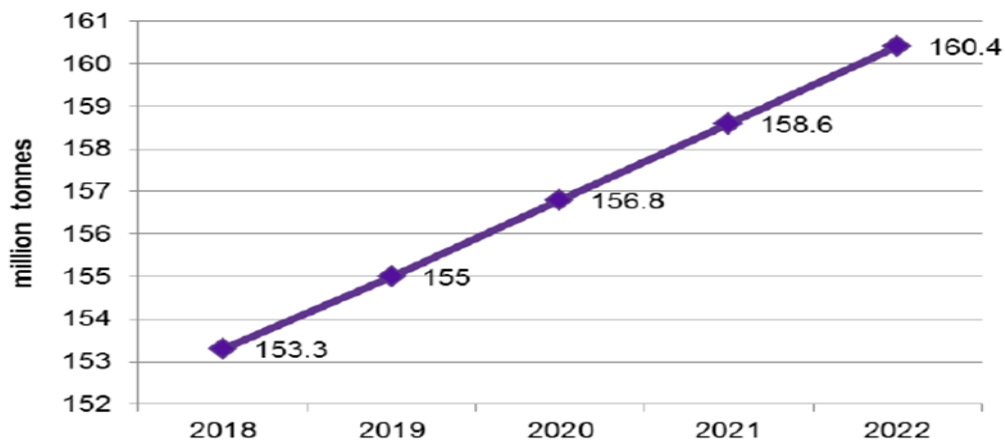
Despite the increasing importance of using packaging as a CSR communication channel, plastic packaging manufacturing and waste have many negative environmental and social effects such as land use, exhaustion of natural resources, pollution (air and marine) and public health and safety concerns (Nkwachukwu et al., 2013). These effects are expected to influence corporations' CSR priorities and intentions due to rising awareness and concern about the environment and social issues among today's consumers. Consequently, this study investigates consumers' perceptions and evaluations of one socially responsible business: plastic packaging recycling.

1.5.1. The UK plastic packaging recycling industry

In a recent report from December 2019, WRAP (2019) highlights that the UK currently recycles 44% of all plastic packaging. Global retail packaging volumes are growing at a fast pace (with 3.4 trillion units in 2016), which contributes to the unsustainable use of natural environmental resources (such as minerals, water, wood, air and landfills) and environmental waste as well as the harm caused to various life forms, Euromonitor (2017a) indicates. In 2014, the UK's accumulated level of plastic materials was estimated to be approximately 3.7 million tonnes, in which packaging was the primary source of plastic waste – estimated at 2.2 million tonnes (accounting for 59% of total plastics waste arisings; WRAP, 2016). WRAP (2016) provides evidence indicating the largest source of plastic packaging is the grocery retail sector, with almost 1 million tonnes (43%) of plastic packaging in 2014. Over six months from 2015 to 2016, approximately 0.6 billion single-use carrier bags were issued by the largest seven retailers (Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Waitrose, M&S, Co-op; Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, 2018). According to Mintel (2017c), the annual UK plastic consumption is estimated to

be around five million tonnes. The total amount of waste accumulated in the UK is expected to grow steadily over five years (2018–2022), with an annual growth of 1% (see **Figure 1.1**), driven by rising population growth and consumption. The WWF Living Planet Report (2016) points out that in one year, the global population uses the Earth’s resources at an equivalent of 1.6 times the rate that nature can reproduce them.

Figure 1.1: Forecast for waste arisings in the UK, 2018–2022.



Source: Mintel (2018b).

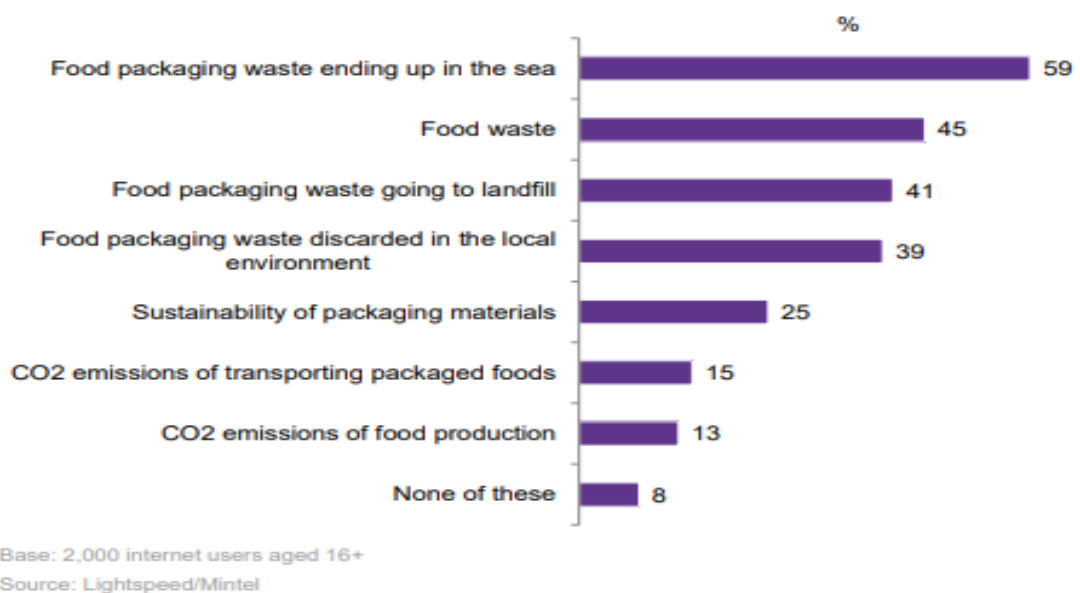
The UK recycling system heavily relies on exporting waste to other countries such as China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Germany and Vietnam, to name just a few (WRAP, 2016). China remains the leading destination for the UK’s recovered plastic (including packaging and non-packaging plastic), accounting for almost two-thirds of the UK’s plastic waste exports (WRAP, 2016). The UK’s recycling industry now faces the pressure of China’s ban on importing plastic waste and paper, which was announced in early 2018 (Mintel, 2018b). Between January and November 2018, the UK was still one of the top five plastic exporters in the world (Statista, 2020; Tiseo, 2020).

In order to reduce waste, packaging regulations came into force as of October 2015, replacing the regulations of 2013 (Euromonitor, 2018a) in which large retailers in England are required to charge five pence for all single-use carrier bags (WRAP, 2016). In 2017, the UK and EU governments announced new targets to tackle packaging waste with a particular emphasis on reducing single-use plastic packaging (Euromonitor, 2018a). In the UK, there have been calls to ban the distribution of plastic straws, reduce the use of plastic bottles and impose new taxes on plastic packaging (Mintel, 2018a). According to a recent announcement, a UK plastic tax will come into effect from April 2022 (Caines, 2020). As a result, UK supermarkets have been trying to eliminate their

use of unnecessary single-use plastic, including 3,400 tonnes of plastic packaging from fresh produce and 137.5m plastic stickers from fruits and vegetables (WRAP, 2019).

The recycling rate among UK households is also expected to increase due to the growth of an environmentally conscious population (Mintel, 2018c). **Figure 1.2** below demonstrates the top concerns among consumers about food packaging and waste. Plastic remains one of the biggest environmental concerns among consumers, even in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic (Baram, 2020; Hopping, 2020). These perceptions among consumers make it obvious to industry players that they need to tackle the plastic issue.

Figure 1.2: Top concerns among consumers about food packaging and waste, Feb 2020.



Source: Caines (2020).

Consumers of all ages have adopted more sustainable ways to live, travel and shop. Millennials are most engaged in environmental issues; for Generation Z, supporting ethical brands is important (Deloitte, 2020). A report by Nielsen (2015) has shown that global online consumers across 60 countries were willing to pay more for products and services from companies that care about sustainability. The report also reveals that 75% of Generation Z consumers (up from 55% in 2014) are willing to pay more for sustainable products. Similarly, Unilever’s international survey (2017) demonstrates a high level of consumer expectations towards brands regarding their social and environmental impacts. With the Covid-19 global pandemic, more than half of consumers surveyed still think environmental issues are important, while others think they are critical (Kantar, 2020). Plastic has become more prominent as an issue, and consumers are more conscious about the social and environmental concerns. Thus, it would be relevant and interesting to see

how young consumers perceive and evaluate brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives among brands and retailers.

1.6 Outline of the thesis structure

The remainder of the thesis will proceed as follows. Chapter two reviews the extant literature on consumer scepticism towards CRM, advertising and CSR. It also discusses the theoretical foundations and framework the research is built upon, including attribution theory and the heuristic-systematic model. Chapter three considers the generational cohort in marketing and the chosen population of this study, Generation Z. Chapter four justifies the research methodology used to conduct the research and collect and analyse the data. Chapter five outlines the findings and analysis of the main study and reviews the results in light of past studies and the proposed framework. Chapter six, the final chapter, provides the theoretical and practical contributions of the project, indicates some limitations and suggests several directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the relevant literature on consumer scepticism. The chapter opens by defining the concept of scepticism and outlining its various types. It then provides a critical analysis of previous studies on consumer scepticism towards various targets such as cause-related marketing (CRM), advertising and CSR. A dedicated section engages in an in-depth analysis of CSR scepticism. Subsequently, the chapter explains two theoretical foundations that this study relies upon to explore consumer scepticism, including attribution theory and the heuristic-systematic model.

2.2 Consumer scepticism

2.2.1 Definitions and types of consumer scepticism

A review of the literature reveals multiple definitions of scepticism. First, scepticism can be understood as a cognitive response in the form of a tendency to disbelieve or distrust others (Huang & Darmayanti, 2014; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Foreh and Grier (2003, p. 350) broadly define scepticism as ‘consumer distrust or disbelief of marketer actions’. For Mohr et al. (1998), scepticism has been referred to as a cognitive response that varies due to different communication contents and contexts. Similarly, Pomeroy and Johnson (2009a) define scepticism as a cognitive response when exposed to persuasive content.

Morel and Pruyn (2003) have mentioned that it is necessary to distinguish between the terms scepticism, distrust, disbelief and doubt. The scholars state that doubt can occur in the absence of knowledge or lack of sufficient information, making it difficult for someone to make up their mind. In contrast, disbelief relates to the credibility of information and is more definitive than scepticism. The authors add that while disbelief means that someone disbelieves the information and has accepted it as untrue, scepticism refers to someone who is sceptical and is still deciding whether to accept information as accurate. According to these scholars, distrust (cynicism) equates to suspicion and the evaluation of something or someone’s honesty and reliability; scepticism means evaluating the extent to which something is true. Huang and Darmayanti (2014) provide another distinction between these two terms. In particular, cynicism, as a characteristic, remains consistent over time regardless of situation and time, whereas sceptical people can be convinced with proof and evidence. In this study, scepticism is referred to as a cognitive response to persuasive communications about socially responsible initiatives

among brands and retailers, and it means evaluations of the truth regarding brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) believe the term 'scepticism' originally derives from the Greek word '*skeptomai*', which means 'to consider' or 'reflect'. Scepticism can be viewed positively (Mohr et al., 1998, as cited in Do Paço & Reis, 2012) because it assists people in making better decisions and may stimulate honesty among advertisers (Obermiller et al., 2005). Hence, it is argued that consumer scepticism is not necessarily detrimental as it can also promote defensive attitudes among consumers (Koslow, 2000) and motivate brands and retailers to strive for consumer trust, an essential factor for brand loyalty (Bakhtiari, 2020). Importantly, brand loyalty ultimately affects business longevity and success (Kuchinka et al., 2018). In order to cultivate trust in this digital age, brands and retailers must be transparent about their business practices (Fertik, 2019; Kappel, 2019). In doing so, they arguably improve the level of transparency across industries and sectors.

There are two distinct types of scepticism, namely situational scepticism and pre-dispositional scepticism. On the one hand, situational scepticism means individuals' perceptions can be influenced based on the amount of information or context given to them (Zhang & Hanks, 2017). On the other hand, pre-dispositional scepticism means an individual's ongoing tendency to be sceptical towards others' motives without being influenced by context (Foreh & Grier, 2003; Zhang & Hanks, 2017). While some researchers view scepticism as a personality trait (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013) or as ongoing disbelief (dispositional), the majority view scepticism as a temporary state (Albayrak et al., 2013; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Goh & Balaji, 2016; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009) in which situational factors influence consumers. These views of scepticism oppose one another. According to Obermiller and Spangenberg (2000), a single trait of scepticism cannot be used to explain consumer scepticism towards different targets. It is unreasonable to assume the temporary state of scepticism or trait-based scepticism among the chosen study population, Gen Z individuals in the UK.

Previous studies focus heavily on scepticism towards CRM, advertising and subsequent consumer-related outcomes. Scepticism towards particular targets such as advertising and certain dimensions of CSR initiatives may only reveal consumers' behaviours associated with a particular communication element (such as advertising) and a specific form of CSR initiative (such as CRM). This study aims to explore consumer scepticism towards

another form of CSR – socially responsible practices – to extend our knowledge of this matter and investigate how scepticism has developed among a particular consumer group, Gen Z.

2.2.2 Review of the consumer scepticism literature

2.2.2.1 Consumer scepticism towards cause-related marketing (CRM)

Claimed to be the most practised form of CSR activities (Kotler & Lee, 2005), CRM appears to receive much consumer scepticism. Research on CRM scepticism has attracted a considerable amount of attention among scholars, which can be analysed into three themes as follows:

Table 2.1: Categories of research on CRM scepticism.

Main research themes	Authors
Factors that influence CRM scepticism	Bae, 2018; Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001; Chaabouni et al., 2021; Chang & Cheng, 2015; Christofi et al., 2018; Mendini et al., 2018; Priporas et al., 2019; Thomas & Kureshi, 2020
Effects of CRM scepticism on consumer evaluation and behavioural responses	Anuar & Mohamad, 2012; Anuar et al., 2013; Bae, 2018, 2020; Mendini et al., 2018; Sabri, 2018; Webb & Mohr, 1998
Overcoming CRM scepticism	Anuar et al., 2013; Bae, 2018; Brønn & Vrioni, 2000; Chang & Cheng, 2015; Christofi et al., 2018; Mendini et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2009

Regarding factors that influence consumer scepticism, prior studies reveal diverse findings. For instance, Brønn and Vrioni (2000, 2001) indicate that CRM knowledge and awareness plays a vital role in influencing scepticism among consumers. Bae (2018) illustrates that when a company only states their public-serving benefits in the CRM statement, it can increase consumers' scepticism of the motives behind their CRM engagement activities. Chaabouni et al. (2021) claim that CRM scepticism will be significantly triggered under the significant donation size condition. Chang and Cheng (2015) indicate that consumer shopping orientation (utilitarian) and mindset (individualism) can facilitate consumer scepticism towards CRM advertisements. Mendini et al. (2018) provide evidence that the level of brand-cause fit can influence CRM scepticism. Priporas et al. (2019) investigate the macro-environment influence on CRM scepticism, where the findings show that political and legal factors influence CRM scepticism.

Consumer scepticism towards CRM varies among consumers (Anuar & Mohamad, 2012; Anuar et al., 2013; Bae, 2018, 2020; Chaabouni et al., 2021; Mendini et al., 2018) in relation to different targets (Priporas et al., 2019), which, in turn, influences subsequent consumer evaluations and behavioural responses (Anuar & Mohamad, 2012; Anuar et al., 2013; Bae, 2018, 2020; Sarbi, 2018; Webb & Mohr, 1998). In particular, Anuar and Mohamad (2012) and Anuar et al. (2013) demonstrate that high and low sceptics perceive CRM differently. As a result, their purchase intention towards CRM products differs. Bae (2018) also finds that consumer scepticism affects consumers' further actions towards brands, e.g. joining a brand's social page. In a different study, Bae (2020) indicates that high and low sceptics process CRM messages differently, which in turn influences their messages evaluation and intentional behaviours.

Moreover, Sabri (2018) illustrates that scepticism towards CRM engagement motives explains the detrimental effect of CRM parodies on the brand and the cause they claim to support. Additionally, Webb and Mohr (1998) find that sceptics who have pre-scepticism towards CRM respond negatively towards CRM campaigns. These findings demonstrate the positive link between consumer scepticism, consumer evaluations and behavioural responses. On the contrary, Chang and Cheng (2015) have found a negative relationship between consumer ad scepticism and consumer purchase intentions. Furthermore, according to Gupta and Pirsch (2006), consumer scepticism towards the company's CRM motives was not found to influence the effect of consumer attitude toward company-cause fit on the consumers' purchase intentions. In terms of the effects of CSR scepticism on consumer evaluations and behavioural responses, previous studies have demonstrated contradictory results regarding the adverse effects of scepticism.

Despite being unequally sceptical, consumer scepticism towards CRM can still be overcome with certain tactics. For example, in the Malaysian national context, Anuar et al. (2013) state that CRM scepticism can be overcome with increased awareness and knowledge about the benefits of CRM to relevant stakeholders. This result is consistent with Brønn and Vrioni's study (2000, 2001) on Norway. This research contrasts, however, with findings from Thomas and Kureshi's work (2020), which indicates that a higher level of awareness could result in greater scepticism among Indian consumers. Bae (2018) indicates that acknowledging the firm-serving benefit motivation of CRM engagement can result in less scepticism of the motivation behind a company's charitable action. Framing messages that correspond to a specific mindset can result in better message engagement, which in turn enhances message evaluation and intentional

behaviours among consumers, as Bae (2020) states. Chang and Cheng (2015) illustrate that consumer shopping orientation (hedonistic) and mindset (collectivism) can reduce consumer scepticism towards CRM ads. According to Christofi et al. (2018), perceived control over the process in CRM campaigns regarding choices of cause type, cause proximity and type of donation can reduce scepticism, which in turn increases the perceived transparency of the procedures of the campaign. Mendini et al. (2018) provide evidence showing that a taxonomic partnership receives a higher level of scepticism that can be reduced by focusing on and directing consumer attention to promotion-focused activities. Singh et al. (2009) illustrate that repeating the CRM claims means increasing familiarity with the claims among target audiences, and this repetition can help trigger positive attitudes towards the CRM claims.

As the above review demonstrates, CRM scepticism has attracted significant attention from scholars. The next section provides a detailed discussion of consumer scepticism towards advertising and other targets as a means to illustrate the gap in the literature on consumer scepticism towards CSR.

2.2.2.2 Consumer scepticism towards advertising and other targets

Consumer scepticism has been a topic of concern within consumer behaviour research and marketing studies. Consumer scepticism has often been targeted towards advertising, one popular marketing tactic, and for a good reason. Today's marketplace offers many choices of products and services at a similar price, bombarding consumers with advertisement claims via all sorts of communications. It is reasonable to question or doubt the truthfulness and motives of advertisers. According to Bailey (2004), there is an increased level of consumer scepticism towards marketing practices and marketing communications. This scepticism might mean that consumers hold a negative attitude towards a company's motives, claims and information sources (Bailey, 2004). Therefore, it is relevant to investigate scepticism concerning consumers' evaluations of a brand or a retailer's CSR engagement, as brands and retailers often have different motivations for implementing CSR and using various marketing techniques to communicate their CSR activities to various stakeholders.

A summary of previous studies on consumer scepticism towards advertising as well as other targets can be analysed into four main themes, as follows:

Table 2.2: Categories of research on consumer scepticism towards advertising and other targets, including product type, food labels, sales promotions and loyalty programs.

Main research themes	Authors
Antecedents of scepticism towards advertising and product type	Huang & Darmayanti, 2014; Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Morel & Pruyn, 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Silva et al., 2020; Tan, 2002; Thakor & Goneau-Lessard, 2009
Different levels of scepticism	Diehl et al., 2008; Feick & Gierl, 1996; Fenko et al., 2016; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000; Do Paço & Reis, 2012; Thakor & Goneau-Lessard, 2009; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Yu, 2020
Effects of scepticism towards advertising, product type, food labels, sales promotions and loyalty programs on the effectiveness of the ad, consumer attitude, perceptions and behaviours, respectively.	Amos & Grau, 2011; Bailey, 2007; Činjarević et al., 2018; De Pechpeyrou & Odou, 2012; Eggert et al., 2015; Morel & Pruyn, 2003; Obermiller et al., 2005; Raziq et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2020; Thakor & Goneau-Lessard, 2009; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Yu, 2020
Overcoming scepticism towards advertising, loyalty programs and food labels	Eggert et al., 2015; Fenko et al., 2016; Xie & Kronrod, 2012

Regarding drivers of scepticism towards advertising, Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) indicate that age, experience, education, cynicism, self-esteem and shared marketplace belief influence scepticism towards advertising. Thakor and Goneau-Lessard (2009) also find that age and language can influence ad scepticism. However, Morel and Pruyn (2003) reveal the opposite result, showing that age may impact ad scepticism but not significantly affect scepticism towards new products. In the green ad scepticism context, Yu's findings (2020) show that male respondents are more sceptical of advertising in general, while female respondents are more sceptical of the green ad. In the same green ad context, Yu's (2020) findings regarding level of scepticism among female respondents oppose those of Huang and Darmayanti (2014). Regarding marketplace experiences, the results from Obermiller and Spangenberg's study (1998) are consistent with those from Feick and Gierl (1996), who uncover how market experience leads to different levels of scepticism towards ad claims among German consumers. Overall, there is some inconsistency in terms of the factors that influence ad scepticism.

Similarly, contradictory results have surfaced in the research stream on the antecedents of green ad scepticism. For example, in Matthes and Wonnebergers's study (2014), a

negative relationship between green consumerism and green ad scepticism was found. On the contrary, Do Paço and Reis (2012) suggest that more environmentally concerned consumers are more sceptical towards green communication, which is consistent with Huang and Darmayanti's findings (2014). Similarly, Silva et al. (2020) provide evidence showing that environmental knowledge and environmental values are antecedents of ad scepticism among French consumers. Matthes and Wonneberger's study (2014) shows that information utility influence green ad scepticism. It is evident that scepticism towards advertising and green ads can be varied and influenced by various factors.

Scholars reveal different results regarding the antecedents of scepticism towards different targets, including new products, food labels and printed ads. Specifically, Morel and Pruyn (2003) provide a list of several significant sources of new product-based scepticism, including quality, serviceability and information credibility. Fenko et al. (2016) indicate that consumers are more sceptical of the hedonic label (manufacturers' claims) than the health label (third-party approved labels). The authors contend that scepticism may vary among consumers depending on their familiarity with a given label (e.g. more people are familiar with health labels than hedonic labels). Tan (2002) argues that scepticism towards the information value of printed ads depends on a combination of the type of claim (subjective versus objective) and its level of extremity/exaggeration. Particularly, regarding product advertisements, the combination of an objective claim and a high level of extremity leads to greater scepticism than a subjective claim with high level of extremity (Tan, 2002). Printed ads and food labels can be considered sources of information in marketing and advertising communications, and consumer scepticism varies depending on the type of claim (subjective vs objective, as in Tan, 2002; and third-party approved labels vs manufacturers' claims, as in Fenko et al., 2016). As can be seen, the source of information in persuasive communication is crucial in influencing consumer scepticism.

Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) explain that some adverts attract more scepticism than others. This claim is also expressed in the study carried out by Diehl et al. (2008), where the findings show that scepticism towards pharmaceutical advertising is lower than consumer scepticism towards advertising in general. Diehl et al. (2008) explain that existing government regulations may enhance consumer confidence regarding pharmaceutical advertising. Feick and Gierl (1996) demonstrate that experience claims (versus credence claims) were viewed with a lower level of scepticism among both East and West German consumers as experience claims can be evaluated after use. Consistent

with these findings, Thakor and Goneau-Lessard (2009) state that among adolescents, social ads scepticism is different from commercial ads scepticism as social ads (which encourage or discourage behaviours) are distinct from commercial ads, and peer influence plays a role in shaping scepticism towards them. Similarly, Fenko et al. (2016) indicate that consumers are less sceptical of health labels than hedonic labels in the packaged food context due to prior exposure to the labels (discussed above). Tan (2002) also illustrates that combining the type of claim and the level of extremity can lead to scepticism towards printed ads for products (search attributes) but not services (experience attributes). Obermiller and Spangenberg's study (2000) shows that scepticism towards advertising and salespersons is higher than scepticism towards less commercial sources (e.g. friends, consumer reports and a government agency), which indicates that the credibility and trustworthiness of the information vary among individuals.

The level of scepticism towards advertising has been demonstrated to vary among consumers. In particular, Diehl et al. (2008) provide evidence showing that US consumers are less sceptical of general advertising and both prescription and non-prescription drug advertisements compared to German consumers who may have difficulties evaluating their level of scepticism towards ads for such products (drugs). Similarly, Feick and Gierl (1996) indicate that West German consumers are more sceptical of ad claims than East German consumers due to the differences in market experiences. Yu's study (2020) highlights the different levels of scepticism towards a general ad and a green ad among male and female Chinese consumers. Yu (2020) maintains that male respondents are more sceptical of green ads than female respondents because they are more sceptical of advertising in general. In addition, Silva et al. (2020) find different levels of scepticism between Brazilian and French consumers due to market relationships, power relations and consumer trust. Cross-cultural and same-culture studies show that levels of scepticism differ among people.

Moreover, studies by Do Paço and Reis (2012) and Huang and Darmayanti (2014) share the same findings: a higher level of scepticism depends on the level of environmental concern among consumers. Obermiller and Spangenberg (2000) have found that ad scepticism among children is learnt and different from their parents' ad scepticism due to variations in marketplace beliefs. Since the level of scepticism among individuals differs across cultures and within-country subgroups, it would be interesting to explore scepticism among Gen Z members born in the internet era and can interact with people from different cultures.

The relationship between consumer scepticism towards advertising, product type, food labels and relevant consumer responses has been documented. Some scholars have found a positive relationship between consumer scepticism and its related outcomes, such as consumer attitudes and perceptions of the endorsed product (Bailey, 2007) and product experience, evaluation and purchase intent among consumers (Fenko et al., 2016). On the contrary, others have revealed a negative relationship between scepticism and its related outcomes. Particularly, Do Paço and Reis (2012) uncover a negative relationship between green ad scepticism and green buying behaviours. Similarly, Raziq et al. (2018) illustrate that ad scepticism negatively links to brand attitudes.

On the one hand, scholars have found that scepticism leads to negative effects on buying impulses and rewards thoughts towards a weight-loss ad (Amos & Grau, 2011), the purchase intent and the effect of perceived savings (De Pechpeyrou & Odou, 2012), attitude towards a company and loyalty among consumers (Eggert et al., 2015), product judgement and purchase intent (Morel & Pruyn, 2003), attitude towards an ad (Thakor & Goneau-Lessard, 2009), how much consumers trust an ad with precise numbers (Xie & Kronrod, 2012) and the usefulness of an ad and the emotion (Yu, 2020). Činjarević et al. (2018) provide evidence showing that scepticism towards organic food has a moderating effect on the relationships between subjective norms and consumer attitudes towards buying organic food.

On the other hand, some scholars have found that scepticism leads to positive outcomes. In particular, green scepticism leads to positive attitudes towards green consumption in France (Silva et al., 2020) and positive attitudes towards a green ad among Chinese women (Yu, 2020). Despite contradictory results, findings from past studies prove the strong and positive relationship between consumer scepticism and negative consumer responses. For practical implications, there is a need to understand how and what generates scepticism among consumers, from which more effective marketing strategies can be developed.

Overcoming consumer ad scepticism can be achieved by different tactics that vary based on targets or industries. For example, in a study of consumer scepticism towards weight-loss advertising, Amos and Grau (2011) provide evidence showing that visceral cues such as before and after photos can increase buying impulses and reward thoughts among consumers. For the service industry, Eggert et al. (2015) suggest that scepticism can be reduced by appropriate designs of consumer choice to be endowed, proximity to status achievement and perceived value of the preferential treatment, which in turn positively

influences customer gratitude, behaviour and attitudinal loyalty. Overcoming scepticism can be done by improving a consumer's multisensory experience and increasing the credibility of label claims in the food-related product category (Činjarević et al., 2018; Fenko et al., 2016). Regarding environmental ad claims, scepticism can be surmounted with topical knowledge of the environmental issues advertised (Xie & Kronrod, 2012). Regardless of the level of scepticism among consumers, it is possible to overcome scepticism by implementing specific tactics within the respective industry. The most important aspect is to be aware of levels of scepticism and what triggers it; subsequently, brands, retailers and marketers can develop strategies to overcome and, more importantly, avoid scepticism in the first place. Thus, this study aims to investigate factors that influence consumer scepticism towards socially responsible initiatives.

A review of the literature on consumer scepticism reveals that advertising is open to scepticism due to its persuasive attempt, which is similar to CSR communications. From the discussions above, it can be concluded that consumer scepticism varies across cultures and sub-cultures, across product categories and depends on the type of claim and the type of source of information. As indicated by many researchers, the source of information is vital in influencing scepticism among consumers. In this sense, the current study investigates how Gen Z perceives and evaluates socially responsible initiatives.

In general, consumer scepticism may affect consumers' evaluations and behavioural responses. However, consumer scepticism can be alleviated with certain tactics that vary based on industries and additional factors. It is necessary to understand the factors that influence consumer scepticism and the level of scepticism among consumers so that marketers can fully deliver the desired intentions and avoid misconceptions. In the scope of this study, factors including information and communication sources that potentially influence scepticism among Gen Z towards one of the components of CSR are investigated.

Previous research has brought valuable insights into consumer scepticism towards CRM, advertising and other targets, including product type, food labels, sales promotions and loyalty programs. However, consumer scepticism towards other forms of CSR remains largely unexplored. Consequently, this study investigates consumer scepticism towards a specific area of socially responsible business practices.

2.2.2.3 Consumer scepticism towards CSR

As illustrated in the table below, numerous previous studies have attempted to investigate CSR scepticism (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Research categories of CSR scepticism literature.

Research categories	Author(s)
Factors influencing CSR scepticism	Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Elving, 2012; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Joireman et al., 2018; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Moscato & Hopp, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rim & Kim, 2016; Schmeltz, 2012; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Vanhamma & Grobbsen, 2009; Yoon et al., 2006; Zhang & Hanks, 2017; Zhao et al., 2020
Scepticism and its effects in the CSR context	Albayrak et al., 2013; Becker-Olsen et al. 2006; Chen & Chiu, 2018; De Vries et al., 2015; Elving, 2012; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Goh & Balaji, 2016; Ham & Kim, 2020; Joireman et al., 2018; Lee, 2020; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Mantovani et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rim & Kim, 2016; Romani et al., 2016; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Theofilou & Jerofejeva, 2010
Overcoming CSR scepticism	Connors et al., 2017; Moreno & Kang, 2020; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009a

The available studies clearly demonstrate that CSR scepticism is driven by a variety of factors. Within a hospitality context, Zhang and Hanks (2017) examine the combined effects of three different factors (need for cognition, processing fluency and mood) in influencing scepticism towards CSR messages. Concerning scepticism towards CSR communication, Joireman et al. (2018) discover that scepticism towards CSR advertising is driven by the features of the ad's claim, including the type of ad claim and the ad appeal. It has been illustrated that drivers of scepticism vary within the same CSR context, and to date, little is known about drivers of scepticism towards socially responsible initiatives.

CSR scepticism is connected to consumer evaluations of CSR motivations. Consumer attributions of motives have been long established to understand consumers' evaluation of the motives behind CSR. Rim and Kim (2016) state that CSR scepticism is related to CSR attributions of motives behind CSR actions. Ellen et al.'s investigation (2006) of consumer attributions and perceived CSR provides a concrete foundation for many researchers (Chen & Chiu, 2018; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014) to investigate how consumers attribute different motives to firms' CSR actions.

Investigating consumer attributions and CSR scepticism, Moscato and Hopp (2019) have demonstrated that individual personality traits influence the interpretation of CSR strategies. Moscato and Hopp (2019) find that individuals high in extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness were less sceptical, while those high in neuroticism were more sceptical of CSR practices. Correspondingly, those who possess high levels of extraversion and agreeableness associate CSR behaviours with value motives, while those who possess high levels of neuroticism associate CSR behaviours with egoistic motives. Relatedly, Zhao et al. (2020) demonstrate that consumers attributed stakeholder-driven motives based on the idea that enterprises performed CSR activities due to stakeholder pressures, leading to increased suspicion of corporate hypocrisy (a mismatch between what companies say and do), while value-driven motives led to the opposite result.

Similarly, studies by Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013), Skarmeas et al. (2014) and Chen and Chiu (2018) show conflicting results regarding consumer attributions and its connection to CSR scepticism. It is evident that there is a conflict in terms of the relationship between consumer attributions and CSR scepticism. More importantly, these findings provide no evidence on how people arrive at those attributions, and sources of consumer attributions have been largely unexplored (Marin et al., 2015, as cited in Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Yoon et al., 2006, as cited in Marin et al., 2015). This gap clearly provides a pathway to investigate the causal explanations of consumer attributions of motives behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

The extant literature also provides evidence showing that consumers consider a combination of factors when evaluating a company's CSR motives. Particularly, Yoon et al. (2006) have found that under the condition of high benefit salience (high congruence between the cause a company chooses to support and the company's core image, products or target market), when consumers learn about CSR activities from a company-based source, the lowest sincerity level is assigned to the company. On the contrary, under low benefit salience, when consumers learn about CSR activities through a neutral and unbiased source, the company is identified with sincere CSR motives. In the same CSR context, Marin et al.'s work (2015) provides evidence of antecedents of consumer attributions of CSR, including corporate ability, company-cause fit, interpersonal trust (associated with positive attribution) and corporate hypocrisy (associated with negative attribution).

According to Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017), consumers evaluate a combination of industry norms, the overall social responsibility of a firm and its corporate history. It is

explained that when green products are not common in the marketplace, and the firm acts in a socially responsible manner and has a long consistent history of environmental practices, consumers attribute intrinsic motivations (acting out of genuine concerns for social issues) to firms. However, when green norms are common and a company behaves similarly to others but has a poor history of environmental practices, consumers tend to assign extrinsic motives (attempting to increase its profits) to firms. The findings in terms of history are somewhat consistent with Schmeltz's study (2012), which indicates a company's long involvement in CSR makes its CSR initiatives appear more credible. Similarly, Vanhamme and Grobbs's results (2009) indicate that in a time of crisis, scepticism towards CSR claims depends on the period of CSR involvement. Previous studies have demonstrated the complexity of different constructs of CSR scepticism, which can lead to different consumer responses. This study will discover what people consider when processing information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and the motives behind those initiatives.

Scholars have investigated the influence of the 'fit' factor on consumers' evaluations of CSR, which subsequently influences consumer behaviours. When examining the influence of fit (between a company and its CSR activity) on scepticism, Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) have found that low-fit negatively influences consumer beliefs, attitudes and intentions (reduces overall attitudes and perceptions towards corporate credibility, corporate positioning and purchase intention) regardless of motivations. Similarly, regarding the 'fit' factor and CSR scepticism, Elving (2012) provides evidence showing that the 'fit' (between the company and the CSR domain) influences scepticism but depends on the company's reputation. Interestingly, scholars have demonstrated that a high level of fit between the companies or firms and the cause they choose to support does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; De Vries et al., 2015; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006). Scholars have produced conflicting results through the 'fit' factor due to different variables (Elving, 2012; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006). These results add to the complexity of the influence of the 'fit' factor alone on consumers' CSR evaluations.

The existing literature suggests that CSR motivations serve as a central factor that influences subsequent consumer behavioural responses. The influence can be positive or negative, depending on how consumers perceive the cause behind a company's CSR involvement and their motivations for implementing CSR programmes. Lee (2020) indicates that a quick-service restaurant's CSR activities, when perceived as reactive, can

lead to a lower likelihood that consumers will attribute sincere motives to the business, leading to scepticism and less favourable evaluations. According to Mantovani et al. (2017), when consumers associate CSR actions with self-serving motives, their scepticism increases towards the CSR actions and subsequently affects pro-social behaviour such as supporting a social cause. Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) also show that high-fit initiatives lead to negative consumer behaviours when initiatives are perceived as reactive. Yoon et al.'s study (2006) shows that the perceived sincerity of motives can vary depending on a combination of factors such as benefit salience, the information source where consumers learn about CSR programmes and the CSR contribution-CSR advertising ratio, all of which can influence the success of CSR campaigns. Importantly, Romani et al. (2016) illustrate that the proper management of perceived CSR motives can mitigate the negative effect of scepticism.

Perceived motives have been demonstrated to influence consumers behavioural responses. Thus, it is crucial to investigate how young consumers perceive and evaluate the motives behind socially responsible initiatives. It is not as simple as performing good deeds and expecting consumers to react positively. For example, in the case of energy companies, De Vries et al. (2015) demonstrate that people are more likely to perceive company motives as corporate greenwashing when businesses invest in environmental measures. It is observed that implementing and communicating CSR does not always lead to positive reactions from the public. Therefore, when communicating CSR to the public, companies must consider how consumers perceive CSR activities and their perceptions and evaluations of the motivations behind CSR initiatives. This understanding underpins the investigation of how Gen Z perceives and evaluates brands and retailers' CSR initiatives.

Regarding scepticism and its effects, prior studies show that different levels of scepticism lead to various attitudes and evaluations of CSR. For instance, consumers with a higher trait of scepticism are more likely to be sensitive towards persuasive marketing tactics and assign a firm-serving motive to corporations (Foreh & Grier, 2003). Ham and Kim's study (2020) shows the opposite impact of consumers' dispositional CSR scepticism and situational CSR scepticism on consumer reactions towards CSR-based crisis response communication. Joireman et al. (2018) indicate that high sceptics respond less favourably to CSR ads because they have a reduced ability to visualise the claims. Findings from García-Jiménez et al.'s study (2017) show that among moderate and high sceptics, congruence (of CSR actions and companies' core business) does not lead to higher CSR

associations (between the company and the social cause), as opposed to the results among low sceptics. According to Rim and Kim (2016), scepticism towards the company's goodwill is the most significant factor in determining consumer attitudes and supportive behavioural intentions, while disbelief in CSR communications or actions and informativeness aspects are substantial predictors for negative consumer attitudes. Findings from Zhang and Hanks's study (2017) are in line with previous findings, which show that various levels of scepticism associated with different processing can lead to different behaviours. As can be seen, levels of scepticism influence consumer behaviours. The influence can be positive or negative, depending on various factors.

A number of studies have investigated the link between CSR scepticism and its related outcomes. Nguyen et al. (2019) find that green scepticism, information and knowledge mediates the negative effect of greenwash on green purchase intention among consumers. According to Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013), CSR scepticism damages retailer equity, reduces resistance to negative information and results in unfavourable word of mouth. Skarmeas et al. (2014) indicate that CSR scepticism influences consumer resistance to negative information and word of mouth under certain conditions. Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) illustrate that green scepticism results in information-seeking about green products and when consumers doubt the environmental benefits of green products, they will develop a decreased willingness to buy them. In the same vein, Goh and Balija (2016) have found that a low level of environmental concern among sceptical consumers might not lead to additional information-seeking, which contradicts Leonidou and Skarmeas's study (2017). In the same green scepticism research stream, Albayrak et al. (2013) argue that scepticism influences the positive effect of environmental concerns on consumer behaviour. These findings reveal the complexity of the effect of CSR scepticism even in the same context (green products). CSR scepticism can lead to multiple outcomes. Since the negative effect of CSR scepticism is apparent, understanding the antecedents (drivers) of it can lead to managerial implications in the competitive business landscape. Thus, CSR scepticism should not be looked at as a uniquely destructive feature.

Regarding CSR scepticism and consumer purchase intention, Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) uncover a negative association between green scepticism and purchase intentions. This result is in line with previous findings from Goh and Balija's work (2016), which indicates that green scepticism has no direct influence on consumer purchase intentions. However, it contrasts with earlier research by Elving (2012), which illustrates that when

the level of scepticism is high, it results in more negative attitudes and lower purchase intentions among consumers. Similarly, Fabiola and Mayangsari (2020) find that green scepticism negatively influences purchase intentions, but the influence is insignificant. Thus, there seems to be inconsistency among previous studies regarding the relationship between scepticism and purchase intentions.

In the CRM context, Anuar and Mohamad (2012) describe a positive relationship between scepticism and consumers' evaluations and attitudes towards cause-related marketing. Anuar et al. (2013) also find a positive link between consumer scepticism and purchase intentions of cause-related products among Malaysian consumers. These results reveal an inconsistency regarding scepticism on consumer purchase intentions and the influence of scepticism on consumer evaluations of green and cause-related products. As can be seen, the relationship between consumer scepticism and consumer-related outcomes is different among green products (CSR context) and cause-related products (CRM context). This finding indicates the different results regarding consumer scepticism in the same context (CSR), which illustrates the need for further investigation of consumer scepticism towards an overlooked area of CSR, socially responsible business practices.

Findings from previous studies have demonstrated that scepticism influences consumer behaviour in many ways. The influence is not necessarily negative. In particular, Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) indicate that when a firm's motives are perceived as self-serving, no reduction of perceived corporate credibility can be observed. This result is somewhat consistent with Schmeltz's study (2012). Specifically, the result shows that even when CSR engagement is perceived as a self-serving motive, no effect on the overall evaluation of CSR activities can be observed. Similarly, Foreh and Grier (2003) also point out that higher trait-based scepticism does not relate to evaluations of a firm. Goh and Balaji (2016) illustrate that green scepticism has no direct influence on green purchase intentions. This result is consistent with Leonidou and Skarmeas's study (2017). Interestingly, despite being sceptical of CSR communications, practices and informativeness, individuals may still be supportive of charitable behaviours (Rim and Kim, 2016). Moreover, according to Theofilou and Jerofejeva (2010), scepticism does not influence CSR evaluations or decisions to reward or punish a company. These findings show a consistent negative relationship between consumer scepticism and such consumer-related outcomes, which contrasts with other studies that indicate the positive relationship between CSR scepticism and adverse consumer-related outcomes (Albayrak et al., 2013; Elving, 2012; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Joireman et al., 2018; Rim &

Kim, 2016; Romani et al., 2016). Regardless of inconsistent results regarding the effect of scepticism on consumer behaviours, understanding scepticism can be crucial to develop strategies that enhance desired behavioural responses among consumers.

To overcome CSR scepticism, Connors et al. (2017) state that message concreteness can mitigate the harmful effects of CSR scepticism on responses and CSR information evaluations among consumers. Moreno and Kang (2020) suggest that a good fit between a company's core values and the CSR activities it communicates can alleviate scepticism, and the delivery of CSR information can affect scepticism. Pomeroy and Johnson (2009a) propose using social topic information and message content as indicators of long-term CSR commitment, social impact claims and unplanned corporate personality cues to reduce scepticism towards CSR-based corporate identity. Understanding the sources of CSR scepticism is vital in designing effective CSR communications. This notion navigates the current study.

In terms of national context, most studies on consumer scepticism towards CSR have been carried out in the US (see **Table 2.4**). Hence, a sample from the UK could help broaden our understanding of consumer scepticism regarding geographical perspective. A specific consumer group, Gen Z is chosen, as to date, research about this consumer group is lacking in the marketing field and no research has been carried out studying their scepticism towards socially responsible business practices.

Table 2.4: Summary of past studies on CSR scepticism: country focus and methodology.

Country focus	No. of studies	Methodology	References
US	11	Quantitative	Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Connors et al., 2017; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Joireman et al., 2018; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Moreno & Kang, 2020; Moscato & Hopp, 2019; Rim & Kim, 2016; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Zhang & Hanks, 2017
Brazil	1	Quantitative	Mantovani et al., 2017
Belgium	1	Quantitative	Yoon et al., 2006
Denmark	1	Quantitative	Schmeltz, 2012
Italy	1	Quantitative	Romani et al., 2016
The Netherlands	3	Quantitative	De Vries et al., 2015; Elving, 2012; Vanhamme & Grobбен, 2009
UK	1	Mixed-methods	Theofilou & Jerofejeva, 2010
Spain	1	Quantitative	García-Jiménez et al., 2017
Turkey	1	Quantitative	Albayrak et al., 2013
Taiwan	1	Quantitative	Chen & Chiu, 2018
Indonesia	1	Quantitative	Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020
Malaysia	1	Quantitative	Goh & Balaji, 2016
Vietnam	1	Quantitative	Nguyen et al., 2019
China	1	Quantitative	Zhao et al., 2020

Past research studies have used attribution theory to study CSR scepticism in different contexts such as green products (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017), grocery retailers (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013) and corporate societal marketing (Foreh & Grier, 2003). However, there is no single attribution theory (Alcock & Sadava, 2014; Crittenden, 1983). While the theory has been claimed as appropriate to study consumer scepticism (Foreh & Grier, 2003; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017) and highly relevant to consumer behaviour, it has been underutilised by researchers (Weiner, 2000, as cited in Yoon et al., 2006). Additionally, there is no literature on CSR scepticism via attribution theory in the context of socially responsible initiatives. This gap allows the current research to exploit the

theory to investigate consumer scepticism towards an underexplored category of CSR, socially responsible initiatives.

2.3 Theoretical foundations and framework

According to Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017), attribution theory has been very popular in explaining consumer responses to corporate activities. These scholars find consumers' causal explanations of a given behaviour linked to consumer scepticism. Hence, it is suggested that understanding consumer attributions and the process of making causal inferences can further lead to an understanding of consumer scepticism.

The theory sheds light on consumer attributions. Therefore, it helps answer questions about consumer attributions, such as what do consumers consider when evaluating a brand or a retailer's socially responsible activities and their motives? This question unveils the cognitive process individuals go through to infer the cause of a given behaviour (Calder & Burnkrant, 1977). Mizerski et al. (1979) indicate that AT is concerned with the perceptions of a given target and the process of causal attribution. Therefore, the theory is relevant for the investigation of consumer perception of brands and retailers' socially responsible practices and the cognitive process consumers go through to arrive at the causal attribution of motive(s) behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

Additionally, Hartmann and Moeller (2014) claim that AT is compatible with the investigation of consumer perception towards corporate responsibility. AT has been claimed to be the most appropriate framework to explain how consumers evaluate the motives of others and how the perceived motives are reflected in their responses (Foreh & Grier, 2003). Taken altogether, AT is well suited for the first research question and objective, investigating how CSR is perceived and evaluated among a specific consumer group.

The second objective of the current study is to investigate the potential drivers of scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. A dual-process theory will be used to address this question. Previously, Keller (1991), cited in Pomeroy & Johnson, (2009a) has related dual-process theories in relation to ad evaluation and brand evaluation. Further, Bae (2020) uses a dual-process model (elaboration likelihood model) to explore how different levels of scepticism lead to different approaches to information processing in judgements of CRM communications. Thus, dual-process models can be valuable and relevant in understanding consumer evaluations of brands and retailers in

the persuasion setting and the process they go through to make judgements when faced with persuasive attempts.

Two key dual-process models of persuasion have emerged in the relevant literature (Samson & Voyer, 2012): the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and the heuristic-systematic model (HSM). These models imply that individuals adopt different information processing routes in the persuasion context (Strack, 1999), which results in attitude formation (Petty & Briñol, 2008; Zhao et al., 2015). Brands and retailers that implement and are involved in social responsibility initiatives are more likely to communicate their stories and actions to customers and the general public. Their communications are more likely to be seen as persuasive since CSR scepticism has been documented (as discussed in chapter 2). Therefore, the dual-process models of persuasion fit in with the context of this research: desiring an image of being socially responsible, brands and retailers would try to ensure they are recognised as such and, thus, positively perceived by the customers. ELM has been widely applied in the socio-psychology and marketing (advertising and consumer behaviour) literature (Li, 2013). However, the current study applies HSM instead of ELM because HSM accepts the existence of two information processing routes (Palomo et al., 2015; Xu, 2017).

Consequently, this study uses AT and the HSM to guide the investigation of consumer attributions and evaluations of CSR and explore factors that influence consumer scepticism towards CSR, respectively. Specifically, AT helps answer the first research question about Generation Z's perceptions of CSR initiatives among brands, manufacturers and retailers. Through information processing routes, the HSM facilitates an investigation of information processing regarding what consumers consider when judging brands and retailers' socially responsible actions. The processing route an individual undertakes not only exposes their level of scepticism (García-Jiménez et al., 2017) but also what they consider as they process information (heuristic cue information or complex information integration or both) to make a judgment (Chen et al., 1999; Lavine, 1999; Spiliopoulos, 2018) about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. As a result, the information processing routes unveil the level of scepticism among individuals and reveal the factors consumers evaluate (corresponding level of individuals' scepticism) when judging brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

Attribution theory explains the cognitive processes employed to form causal explanations (attributions) of brands and retailers' socially responsible actions. Perceived motives

indicate the level of scepticism, which in turn influences how CSR or, more precisely, socially responsible initiatives are perceived and evaluated among the chosen population (RQ1, RO1). The HSM focuses on how people process information in the persuasion setting. Through the routes of the information processing model, the factors that people use (corresponding level of individuals' scepticism) in order to judge brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives will be revealed. Therefore, the HSM provides a model to discover potential drivers of scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives (RQ2, RO2).

2.3.1 Attribution theory and its relationship with CSR scepticism

Originated by Fritz Heider in 1958 concerning a person's perception, the original attribution theory emphasises two distinctions between a personal/internal cause (ability, effort, intention) and a situational/environmental/external cause (luck, task-related factors) relating to the behaviour of others (Howard & Levinson, 1985; Malle, 2011; Mizerski et al., 1979; Savolainen, 2013).

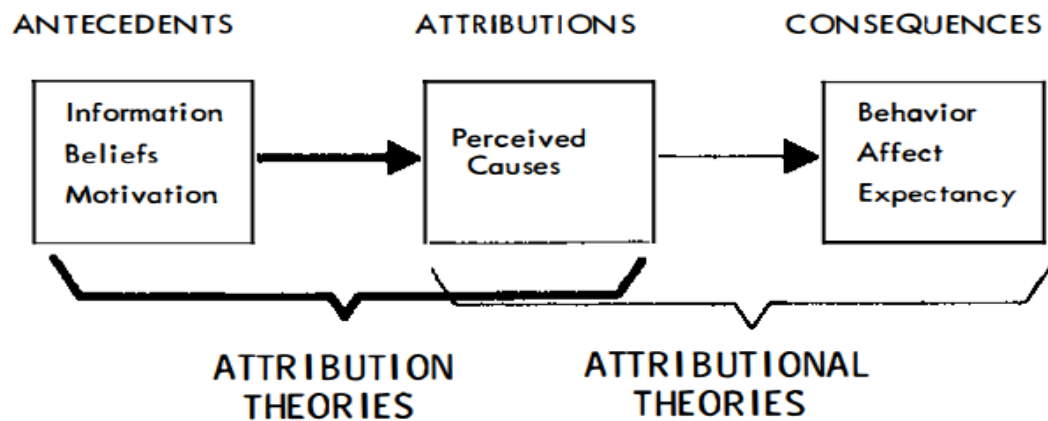
Jones and Davis's correspondence of inference (1965) is concerned with how an individual uses different cues to make inferences about a single action, choosing between a person's disposition or intention (Alcock & Sadava, 2014; Howard & Levinson, 1985). Focusing on person-perception, they propose three criteria that people use in making attributions, including choice and effects, commonality and desirability (Mizerski et al., 1979).

Kelley's (1967, 1973) version of AT is built on criteria including distinctiveness, consensus, consistency over time and consistency over modality to validate attributions (Coombs, 2007; Crittenden, 1983; Settle, 1972). Kelley (1973) defines AT as a theory about how people make causal explanations for events and answer 'why' questions (Mizerski et al., 1979). Kelley's (1967) covariation model or 'four dimensions model' deals with inferences made about the environment in which the actor is behaving' (Sparkman & Locander, 1980, p. 219). Kelley's causal schemata (1971, 1972, 1973) was introduced to reflect the various causes (facilitative and inhibitory) of an effect, action or event (Heckhausen, 1991).

According to Kelley and Michela (1980), consumer attributions are based on three antecedents: information, prior beliefs and motivation. Kelley and Michela (1980) also differentiate how attribution theories emphasise the link between antecedents (information, beliefs and motivations) and attributions (perceived causes), whereas

attributional theories focus on the link between attributions (perceived causes) and consequences (behaviour, feelings, expectancy; see **Figure 2.1**). Despite focusing on different aspects, both types of research concern causal attributions for behaviours or events by ordinary people.

Figure 2.1: General model of attribution field.



Source: Kelley and Michela (1980, p. 459).

Weiner (1985) also follows the work of Heider and looks into the causes of success and failure. Weiner identifies three causal dimensions of attributions: locus of control, stability and controllability (Graham, 2020). For Weiner, the theory in its achievement-context relates the structure of thinking to the dynamics of human emotions and action (Weiner, 1985).

In sum, AT is a collection of theories and approaches that share core assumptions (Alcock & Sadava, 2014; Folkes, 1988; Graham, 2020; Schmitt, 2015). According to Alcock and Sadava (2014), some of the criticisms of attribution theories are (1) they assume that individuals make rational use of the information they have and (2) that people do not usually ask ‘why’ of themselves or others; hence, they are forced to come up with answers when asked a question. Despite the imperfections, the core tenet of the theory is to understand how individuals explain and draw inferences of observed behaviour (Tetlock, 1985). This central goal is highly relevant for investigating consumer attributions of brands and retailers’ socially responsible behaviour and how they arrive at such attributions.

The current study adopts the notion of the original AT developed by Heider (Böhm & Pfister, 2015; Graham, 2020) concerning the perceived personal/internal causes (intention, effort, ability) and environmental/external causes (task difficulty, luck) of a

given behaviour (Heckhausen, 1991; Mizerski et al., 1979). In addition, the foundation of the original AT concerns how people interpret and attribute causes of events or behaviours (Heckhausen, 1991; Howard & Levinson, 1985) and how such attributions affect their perceptions and behaviours (Jackson, 2019; Schmitt, 2015). The internal and external attributions from Heider's original theory can be helpful in understanding scepticism towards brands and retailers' motives.

Kelley's covariation model ignores the knowledge that individuals have about particular situations (Corrigan, 1995). As demonstrated by scholars, knowledge plays a central role in influencing scepticism (Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Zhang & Hanks, 2017). Therefore, Kelley's covariation model is not the most suitable in the context of the current study. The concepts of success and failure are not the focus of the current study; therefore, Weiner's AT does not fit the research context. Additional modern attribution theories (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1974) have been criticised for being an inadequate model in explaining the way people make sense of their surroundings (Crittenden, 1983).

Considering the recent call from Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) on the use of AT to explore the impacts of attributional biases, error and principles in understanding consumers' causal inferences, the discounting principle of AT will be applied in this study. It explains how people arrive at a causal explanation for a given behaviour (Böhm & Pfister, 2015) and maintains that the perceived role of a given cause in leading to a given effect is discounted when other plausible causes are present (Newman & Ruble, 1992). The discounting principle has been suggested for situations with more than one plausible cause for a given event or behaviour (Kelly, 1972, as cited in Rosenfield & Stephan, 1977). In other words, when more than one cause of a given behaviour exists, 'the discounting yields inferences about the validity of any among several causes that have already met the criterion of plausibility' (Kruglanski et al., 1978, p. 187).

AT has a role to play in decision-making behaviours (Kelley, 1973). The nature of behavioural explanations is rather complicated; thus, when interpreting human behaviour, oversimplification cannot offer a complete picture of why people behave in certain ways and the causes of those behaviours (Kelley & Michela, 1980). In the case of consumer scepticism, as mentioned in the previous sections, past studies have revealed multiple factors that cause scepticism among consumers due to the complications of human behaviour and many differences among and even within countries such as culture, religion, technology infrastructure and internet access. However, AT can provide a model

to understand consumer attributions of motives behind brands and retailers' CSR initiatives. Findings from Ellen et al.'s study (2006) demonstrate that consumers' attributions play an essential role in their responses to CSR.

Causal attributions play a central role in human behaviour (Kelley & Michela, 1980). For example, consumers attribute different motives to those who engage in CSR programmes based on what makes sense to them. According to Foreh and Grier (2003), consumers assign two types of motives to firms to make sense of CSR initiatives: firm-serving and public-serving. Firm-serving is whereby motives are believed to serve the firm itself, whereas public-serving focuses on the well-being of external individuals (Foreh & Grier, 2003). According to Graafland and Mazereeuw-Van der Duijn Schouten (2012), CSR initiatives are believed to be motivated by extrinsic motives (financial motives) and intrinsic motives (non-financial motives). On the one hand, extrinsic motives are perceived as exploiting rather than supporting the cause. On the other hand, intrinsic motives occur when consumers believe companies genuinely care about social issues (Romani et al., 2016).

2.3.2 The heuristic-systematic model (HSM), information processing and scepticism

According to Claypool et al. (2012), dual-process models have been developed to explain specific psychological phenomena, including persuasion, person perception, attribution and stereotyping. Therefore, dual processing can help investigate consumer perception and evaluation in the persuasion context. Dual-process models are often associated with two distinct processes in the brain (Spiliopoulos, 2018) that 'can be simultaneously activated' (Anselme, 2019, p. 55). One process is referred to as emotional processing; the other is rational processing (Li et al., 2019). Schafer et al. (2018) classify these as System 1 and System 2, in which System 1 is automatic and requires less conscious effort, and in System 2, the reasoning and decision-making processes depend on consciousness and effortful cognition.

Two well-known dual-process models assume that individuals engage in two modes of information processing when faced with persuasive communication in which one is more effortful and slower (Samson & Voyer, 2012; Spiliopoulos, 2018; Xu, 2017). Under ELM, the two routes are called the central route and peripheral route (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Under HSM, they are referred to as the systematic process and heuristic process (Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Chen et al., 1999). Judgements formed under different processing routes reflect the processed judgement-relevant cues (heuristic processing) or particularistic judgement-relevant information (systematic

processing; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). In other words, the route people take ultimately reveals what they consider when making a social judgement.

Accordingly, in the context of this study, people who follow the heuristic route use simple cues (e.g. message length, in Griffin et al., 2002; the number of arguments, in Liu & Shrum, 2009; or communicator characteristics and audience characteristics, in Chaiken, 1987) to make a judgement of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. People who follow the systematic route use more effort to consider and elaborate all available and relevant information (the argument itself, the person who argues and the causes of the behaviour) to make a judgement about the given behaviour (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012; Todorov et al., 2002). Regardless of the route people take to process information about brands and retailers' socially responsible actions, all the information they rely on guides their attitudes, judgements and behaviours (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012). Using the HSM as a theoretical foundation, this study draws a connection between the two information processing routes and Gen Z's level of scepticism, which reveals factors that influence trust or potentially influence scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible activities.

2.3.3 Conceptual framework

2.3.3.1 Linking scepticism, motivations and consumer attributions

Consumer scepticism may have different meanings and consist of several dimensions in which individuals may be sceptical towards specific products, the truth of ad claims, the advertisers' motives, the value of the information to themselves or society as a whole or the appropriateness of the ad for certain audiences (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). In the scope of this study, the research emphasises the motives behind the socially responsible initiatives among brands and retailers.

A review of the literature shows that scepticism has been treated as a personality trait (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013) or as a temporary state (Albayrak et al., 2013; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Goh & Balaji, 2016; Vanhamme & Grobbsen, 2009). De Vries et al. (2015) state that individuals differ in terms of being sceptical. Therefore, this research proposes that scepticism exists among Gen Z and varies between individuals.

Consumers' perceptions of a firm's CSR motivations affect the perception of corporate hypocrisy (Zhao et al., 2020). Consumers' perceptions of CSR motivations, therefore, play an essential role in influencing subsequent consumer responses. Consumers can be

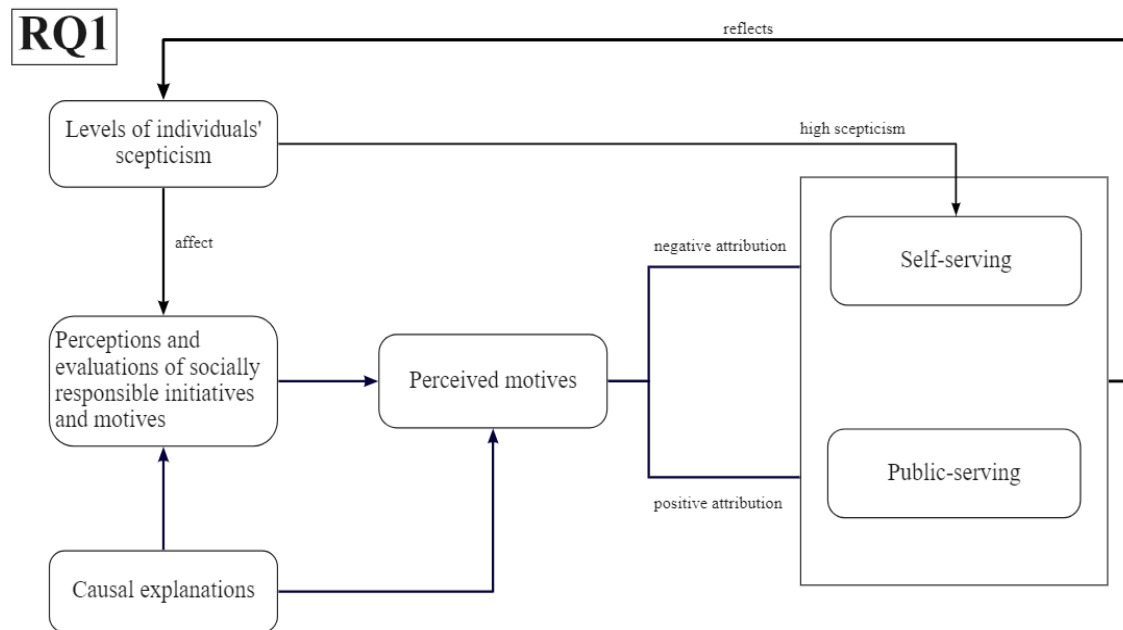
sceptical of the motives (Bailey, 2004; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) behind a company's decisions in CSR involvement (Anuar et al., 2013; Bae, 2018; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Mantovani et al., 2017; Sabri, 2018; Schmeltz, 2012; Webb and Mohr, 1998). Moreover, different levels of scepticism influence consumers' behaviours in various ways (Anuar & Mohamad, 2012; Anuar et al., 2013; Bae, 2020; Diehl et al., 2008; Elving, 2012; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Feick & Gierl, 1996; Fenko et al., 2016; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Joireman et al., 2018; Mantovani et al., 2017; Mendini et al., 2018; Romani et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2020; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Yu, 2020; Zhang & Hanks, 2017).

Based on the discussions above, it is proposed that different levels of scepticism could make Gen Z perceive and evaluate CSR practices and motives differently. When evaluating CSR actions and messages, the scepticism that emerges can have subsequent effects on evaluations and behaviours among consumers (Friestad & Wright, 1994, as cited in Romani et al., 2016). For example, Foreh and Grier's findings (2003) show that a high level of scepticism leads to the negative attribution of firm-serving motive. It is interpreted that the attributed motives (self-serving and public-serving) can be used as indicators of levels of individuals' scepticism which in turn influences consumer perceptions and evaluations of the matter. Relatedly, García-Jiménez et al. (2017) indicate that people can vary in their level of scepticism based on their causal inferences about the motivations behind corporate CSR engagement. In addition, consumer perceptions of several factors (as discussed in the literature review) explain why they attribute different motives to corporate environmental activities (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). The above discussion shows how individuals' scepticism influences consumers' perceptions and evaluations of CSR initiatives and motives which in turn, influences subsequent consumer attribution of motives.

AT is concerned with the processes that individuals employ to evaluate the motives of others, such as marketers, and how these perceived motives influence individuals' attitudes and behaviour (Foreh & Grier, 2003). Thus, AT is appropriate for investigating the cognitive output of the attribution process when a person forms a belief (Mizerski et al., 1979).

Based on the discussion above, the following framework is constructed for RQ1 and RO1.

Figure 2.2: Relationships among the levels of individuals' scepticism, consumers' perceptions and evaluations of CSR initiatives and motives, attribution of motives and the causal explanations.



2.3.3.2 The heuristic-systematic model (HSM), information processing and scepticism

In the context of CRM scepticism, scholars have demonstrated how high sceptics and low sceptics respond differently (Anuar & Mohamad, 2012). Particularly, Anuar et al. (2013) illustrate that high sceptics perceive CRM as cause-exploitative rather than cause-beneficial and low sceptics have a higher intention to buy CRM products. Bae (2020) also demonstrates how high and low sceptics adopt different construal mindsets, which influence message engagement, attitude and participation intention towards CRM campaigns. Similarly, in the same CRM context, Mendini et al. (2018) reveal that consumers expressed different scepticism levels in different types of partnerships (taxonomic versus thematic).

In the context of CSR scepticism, Zhang and Hanks (2017) highlight that people with a high NFC versus low NFC respond differently to CSR messages. These cognitive styles impact how individuals process information. In particular, people with high NFC prefer to engage in cognitive activity, and they prefer more technical and information-laden, low processing fluency messages (difficult to understand), leading to positive outcomes. In contrast, people with low NFC prefer an easy to understand, high fluency message (easy to understand), which leads them to low levels of scepticism. As can be seen, individuals with different cognitive styles process and respond to information differently. This

variation reflects the premise of the dual-process models, where individuals engage in different information processing modes that require divergent levels of cognitive effort.

In sum, individuals are unequally sceptical and respond differently in a persuasive setting because they have various cognitive styles. As a result, they go through different information processing methods when faced with persuasive information and communication from brands and retailers about being socially responsible.

When communicating CSR practices, it is natural for companies to expect positive responses from consumers. However, when people do not trust the messages or claims of corporations, it is less likely they will express favourable attitudes or purchase intentions towards the company (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014). Explicitly, some companies fail to persuade consumers to respond positively to their communications. Previous studies have demonstrated that CSR scepticism can lead to a variety of consumer behavioural responses, often depending on a combination of drivers (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Elving, 2012; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Joireman et al., 2018; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Pomering & Johnson, 2009a; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2006; Zhang & Hanks, 2017). Previous studies show that individuals do not simply use a single cue when it comes to CSR evaluation. However, in some cases, they rely on a single cue in evaluating CSR (e.g. history of CSR involvement; see Schmeltz, 2012; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009). As can be seen, people use different information cues in CSR evaluation.

In persuasion settings, according to the HSM, systematic processing takes place when individuals engage in a more effortful and comprehensive information processing approach (Xu, 2017), access information quality (Zhao et al., 2015) and actively try to access the communication's content to carefully form an evaluative judgement (Sparks & Pan, 2010). Whereas, in the heuristic processing mode, individuals process information with little cognitive effort (Samson & Voyer, 2012) and are more likely to accept the outside information they obtain without suspicion (Zhao et al., 2015). The dual-process views help explain the mental processes consumers go through in evaluating persuasive communication that shapes attitudes (Grayot, 2020; Xu, 2017). The dual-process model also helps clarify human cognition like 'reasoning, judgment, and decision-making' (Grayot, 2020, p. 105).

Building upon the tenet of HSM, this research proposes that when exposed to persuasive communication from brands and retailers about socially responsible initiatives,

consumers are expected to adopt different information processing modes. Under each mode, individuals exert a distinct cognitive effort: they consider different information cues to evaluate persuasive attempts.

Following the systematic route, individuals engage in a thoughtful and conscious process (Sparks & Pan, 2010; Xu, 2017) in evaluating the socially responsible initiatives performed by brands and retailers. Under systematic processing, individuals engage in in-depth processing, including seeking, accessing, evaluating and integrating all available information before forming a judgement (Palomo et al., 2015), reflecting a higher level of scepticism among individuals (García-Jiménez et al., 2017). According to the heuristic route, little cognitive effort is activated (Xu, 2017), meaning people make a judgement with little effort following this mode of information processing. A high level of scepticism is associated with systematic processing (García-Jiménez et al., 2017). Thus, consumers' information processing routes can be indicators of the level of scepticism.

2.3.3.3 Linking consumer knowledge and scepticism

When faced with an evaluative decision, people are believed to judge based on world knowledge and what is presented to create attributions about the behaviour or event (Corrigan, 1995). According to the cognitive response to persuasion by Greenwald (1968, p.149), it is suggested that when a person receives persuasive communication or information, they are 'faced with decisions of accepting or rejecting the persuasion'. The person compares new information to their existing knowledge, attitudes and feelings (Greenwald, 1968; Smith & Swinyard, 1988).

Consumer knowledge is considered paramount in the consumer behaviour context (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987) and the marketing literature (McNeal & McDaniel, 1981). In a discussion about attitude formation and change, McNeal and McDaniel (1981) suggest that as attitudes form or change, consumer behaviours change, and marketers often influence consumer attitude development using information (knowledge). Knowledge is seen as information that can cause attitude formation and change, which can consequently cause changes in consumer behaviour (McNeal & McDaniel, 1981). According to this argument, knowledge and information are not two separate contexts; they are synonymous.

In a discussion of the HSM, Xu (2017) acknowledges the role of individual knowledge and existing attitudes when people process persuasive messages. Scholars have demonstrated that consumer scepticism can be alleviated by increasing CSR and CRM

knowledge and awareness (Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001). Because knowledge or information can be seen to counteract scepticism, a lack of knowledge or information can encourage scepticism. In addition, scholars in the CSR domain have illustrated the influence of knowledge on consumer scepticism (Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001; Silva et al., 2020; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Zhang & Hanks, 2017). Knowledge or information, therefore, can be argued to have an impact on scepticism. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate the source of knowledge (information) – in other words, factors that contribute to consumers' knowledge and awareness and their influence on scepticism (**P1 in Figure 2.3**).

2.3.3.4 Linking types of communication channels and sources with scepticism

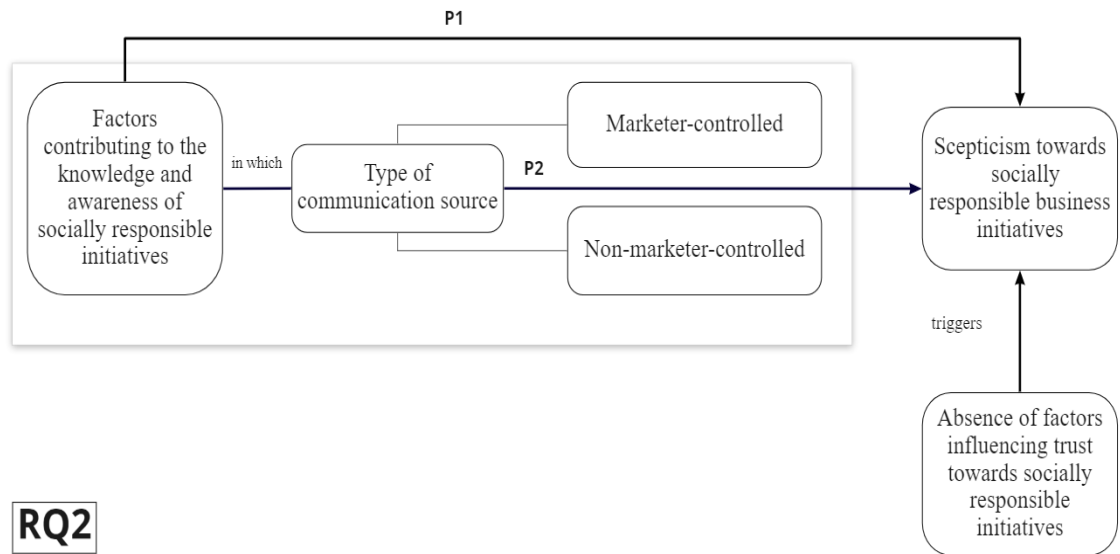
In the context of advertising, scepticism varies depending on the target of information sources (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998, 2000). Regardless of the context, scholars have demonstrated how communication-related factors influence consumer evaluations (Yoon et al., 2006), consumer attributions (Groza et al., 2011) and scepticism (Morel & Pruyn, 2003; Zarei & Maleki, 2018, cited by Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020). Hence, the types of communication channels where Gen Z consumers learn about socially responsible initiatives are worth investigating because they can help explain consumer scepticism. (**P1, P2 in Figure 2.3**).

2.3.3.5 Factors influencing trust and scepticism

Sceptical individuals can be persuaded when proof and evidence are provided (Huang & Darmayanti, 2014; Morel & Pryun, 2003). Hence, it can be argued that a lack of factors that convince people, such as proof and evidence, can trigger scepticism. Investigating factors that influence trust or make people believe something is true can be beneficial in understanding what may trigger scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives among Gen Z (RQ2).

The following framework is constructed based on the discussions above.

Figure 2.3: Factors contributing to the knowledge, awareness, factors influencing trust and scepticism.



RQ2

2.4 Summary

This chapter began with a discussion of the definition and types of scepticism. It then continued with a detailed analysis of consumer scepticism towards cause-related marketing, advertising and other targets, including a discussion of CSR. Theoretical foundations were introduced, from which the proposed frameworks are built. The next chapter provides insights into the chosen studied population, Generation Z, and explains the importance in the marketing field of understanding this generation.

CHAPTER 3. GENERATION Z

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three discusses the concept of the generational cohort in the marketing field and further clarifies the relationship between generational cohorts and consumer behaviour. The chapter continues to discuss Gen Z, and its distinct characteristics. The chapter then presents some figures to indicate the size and purchasing power of the next generation of consumers. The chapter concludes with a summary and acknowledgement of the benefit of understanding the generational cohort concept when targeting consumers, from which brands and marketers can learn to fulfil the demands of the upcoming consumer group.

3.2 Generational cohorts and marketing

Marketers often use market segmentation based on cohorts to target a specific audience (Howell, 2012), to better design promotional campaigns and position or reposition products (Schewe & Noble, 2000). Marketers often use age alongside other factors such as gender, marital status, occupation, income and household size to segment the target market (Chaney et al., 2017). Based on reviews of previous studies, Chaney et al. (2017) illustrate that age-based segmentation is one dimension in addressing consumer needs; hence, the authors suggest placing age-based segmentation in a broader theoretical perspective: generational cohort theory. The theory considers people who experienced the same social, cultural, political, economic and historical events during their formative years (between 17–23), share the same core values and exhibit similar behaviours that may persist throughout their lives (Chaney et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2011).

In this sense, the theory forms generational stereotypes and ignores the individual differences and diversity inherent among any group of people (Jauregui et al., 2020). Similarly, Thach et al. (2021) discuss several issues associated with generational cohort theory. First, the theory ignores the ‘differences within the same age cohort based on country or cultural location’ (p. 3). Second, it does not consider disrupted events such as technological innovations, wars, terrorist attacks or the diseases each generational cohort might experience. However, these forces can shift individuals’ worldviews, values and behaviours in different ways.

Though the chosen population for this study, Gen Z, may exhibit some similarities (see **3.3**), it should not be treated as a homogenous group (Brown, 2017; Gomez et al., 2018; Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Indeed, Gen Z is not identical across countries, expressing distinct perceptions and behaviours towards brands, sustainable consumption

and technology (e.g. social media; Kim et al., 2020). Gen Z is also the most multicultural generation (Taylor, 2016) and expresses individualism through purchases (Euromonitor, 2018b). Since Gen Z individuals value individuality, avoid labels and want to place ‘the self’ through experiment and change (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), the notion of forming one generational stereotype could be problematic.

Regardless of these criticisms of generational cohort theory, Williams and Page (2011) argue that the buying behaviours of each generation are influenced by its unique generational history, experiences, expectations, lifestyle, values and demographics. Having knowledge of cohorts in market segmentation can help identify the most effective strategies to reach targeted consumers (Howell, 2012). In addition, cohort analysis can be helpful in tracking and forecasting changes as members of the cohort move to different life stages, bringing their values and preferences with them (Schewe & Meredith, 2004).

3.2.1 Terminology

Hunter (2012) defines ‘generation’ as those individuals who have shared experiences and a sense of history that shapes their thinking and behaviours. Williams and Page (2011) describe a US generation as a population segment that shares a common social, political, economic and historical environment and is of similar age. Rani and Samuel (2016) argue that a generation is defined based on both its birth years and shared social and economic conditions during its members’ formative years.

Schewe and Meredith (2004) define a generation as people who can be grouped into a period of history that lasts between 20 and 25 years. As each group ages and experiences the same events, they form a connection and behave similarly, differentiating them from other generations (Motta et al., 2002). This point is where a cohort becomes a helpful distinction, as Motta et al. (2002) state. A generational cohort is a group of individuals who shared similar experiences and unique common characteristics based on those experiences (Beldona et al., 2009, as cited in Eastman & Liu, 2012). Similarly, according to Schewe and Meredith (2004), a cohort consists of people who experience the same significant events during their coming-of-age years, and they exhibit the same behaviours due to shared experiences. Motta et al. (2002) indicate that those shared experiences leave strong imprints on behaviours, preferences, values and beliefs that remain unchanged throughout a lifetime.

A cohort consists of individuals who share some significant experiences and events during the same time interval (Alwin & McCammon, 2003; Ryder, 1965). Some

sociologists define a generation as a group of people who share the same historical time frame, and they use 'year of birth' as the events to define the cohort (Alwin & McCammon, 2003). Accordingly, they use the term 'cohort' as a short form of 'birth cohort', which refers to all people born in the same year (Alwin & McCammon, 2003). Some argue that the term 'generation' is not the equivalent of 'cohort' (Fukuda, 2010; Schewe & Meredith, 2004). According to Fukuda (2010), cohorts are established based on the external events that occurred during their late adolescent and early adulthood years. Schewe and Meredith (2004) differentiate a generation by the length of 20–25 years and a cohort by the significant events that define it, which can be long or short.

Given the discussion above, it appears that a generation is simply associated with individuals and the same significant events they experience throughout their lives. In contrast, a cohort experiences the same external events during its formative years, and people share certain values and exhibit similar behaviours, attitudes and preferences that are deeply rooted and remain unchanged over a lifetime. Despite the confusion in terminology, this study uses the term generation in its historical sense, whereby the emphasis is placed upon a group of people who share distinctive identities by having experienced the same external events at the same time interval in their lives.

Defining generations helps researchers better understand how certain external events and technological changes that happen during ones' coming-of-age years can influence the way people behave (Loria & Lee, 2018). External events such as war, economic crises, social and political changes and technological advancements result in the redefinition of social values, attitudes and preferences, in other words, cohort effects (Schewe & Noble, 2000). Since external events leave such significant imprints on behaviours, attitudes, desires and preferences of a coming-of-age group, these cohort effects tend to stay with that cohort and influence it over its lifetime (Motta et al., 2002; Schewe & Noble, 2000).

Schuman and Scott's research (1989) clearly illustrates that cohorts have collective memories from their formative years, and those memories imprint on behaviours and influence cohorts in the future. The key events that happen during those formative or 'coming-of-age' years, 17–24 years of age, shape the cohort's values, attitudes, preferences and behaviours, and these effects remain unchanged throughout the cohort's life (Fukuda, 2010; Parment, 2013). According to Williams and Page (2011), economic changes, scientific progress, technological developments and political and social events such as terrorist attacks can all impact a generation. Jackson et al. (2011) point out that a specific generational cohort is related to distinctive values and priorities that may persist

throughout its members' lifetimes. Values and attitudes are believed to profoundly affect what, when, where and why people purchase products and services (Motta et al., 2002).

Given the discussion above, the concept of cohort effects, age effects and period effects need to be addressed. Gray et al. (2019) clearly distinguish between these three effects. Age effects (ageing) contain changes that happen over the life course of individuals. Period effects happen where culture and economic changes occur during a specific period, resulting in similar changes among people of all ages. Cohort effects refer to the impacts of social and historical changes during early life conditions (Gray et al., 2019) that affect a specific group (Altman, 2015; Alwin & McCammon, 2003) throughout their lifetime. As can be seen, cohort effects are distinctive experiences from formative years that members of a cohort or set of cohorts share that persist throughout their lives (Alwin & McCammon, 2003). According to Altman (2015), an ageing effect refers to differences in life course experiences among individuals because of their chronological age. A period effect is present when external factors are experienced by and equally affect all age groups at a particular point in time (Blanchard et al., 1977).

There is a fine line between period and cohort effects; however, the most critical question asks who is affected by external changes and events (Alwin & McCammon, 2003). When the effects of social and historical events attached to a specific era mainly impact the youth, the result is potentially cohort effects (Alwin & McCammon, 2003). Accordingly, in this case, it can be argued that the cohort effect is present because members of Gen Z were born into the internet era, having access to the internet since birth, and it is more likely to persist throughout their lives. In contrast, older generations may have experienced, witnessed and been affected by technological and internet development at later stages of their lives. The internet is something both Gen Z and older generations have experienced; however, it unequally affects all generations due to different aspects such as social settings, political change, war and economic crises. Born without knowing a world without the internet is a significantly unique event that differentiates Gen Z from other generations, which in turn makes the cohort effect more profound.

It is generally agreed that a cohort consists of people who experience similar events and share common values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (Schewe & Noble, 2000). Members of a generational cohort are believed to share the same experiences, which results in their similar values, beliefs, preferences, motivations, and behaviours (Cruz et al., 2017). Since such similarities exist, brands can offer similar products, services, distribution and communications to potential consumers, who are more likely to respond

similarly to the same marketing communications (Parment, 2013). Cohort segmentation has been used successfully in products positioning and promotional campaigns (Schewe & Noble, 2000).

From a marketing perspective, as suggested by Parment (2013), generational cohorts with different backgrounds, experiences and preferences may have distinct values, attitudes, purchase behaviours and levels of buyer involvement for various products. It appears crucial to understand how purchase decisions differ across product categories; the purchase behaviour of generational cohorts, in particular, could be very valuable (Parment, 2013). This importance results from the need for brands, marketers and retailers to develop appropriate strategies to attract the new generation of consumers whose attitudes, preferences, personal values and behaviours are different from previous generations in light of the internet and technology.

Consumers have become savvy and demand that brands approach them first; thus, cohort segmentation and analysis can help better understand which factors or events a cohort experienced during its formative years, influencing values, attitudes and behaviours in the later stage of life (Schewe & Noble, 2000). Generational cohort analysis can be beneficial in providing a sense of familiarity; it can help capture differences and forecast changes (Parment, 2013) which in turn helps to develop and reposition products as well as better design communications to appeal more to a given cohort's needs and preferences (Fuduka, 2010).

There is no exact cut-off point for generational cohorts (Dimock, 2018). The measurement of a generation varies from seven to ten years up to 20 years, as Markert (2004) indicates. The Pew Research Center (2015) uses a time scale of 15–20-year span to define a generation. However, a cohort that spans more than 15–20 years will have a different assortment of people due to political, social and economic changes (Pew Research Center, 2015). For this reason, it can be said that people within the same generational cohort can exhibit dissimilar behaviours due to external events that influence them in distinctive ways. Hence, Taylor (2018) suggests that generational cohorts should be clearly defined because within-group differences need to be acknowledged and analysed in the marketing field.

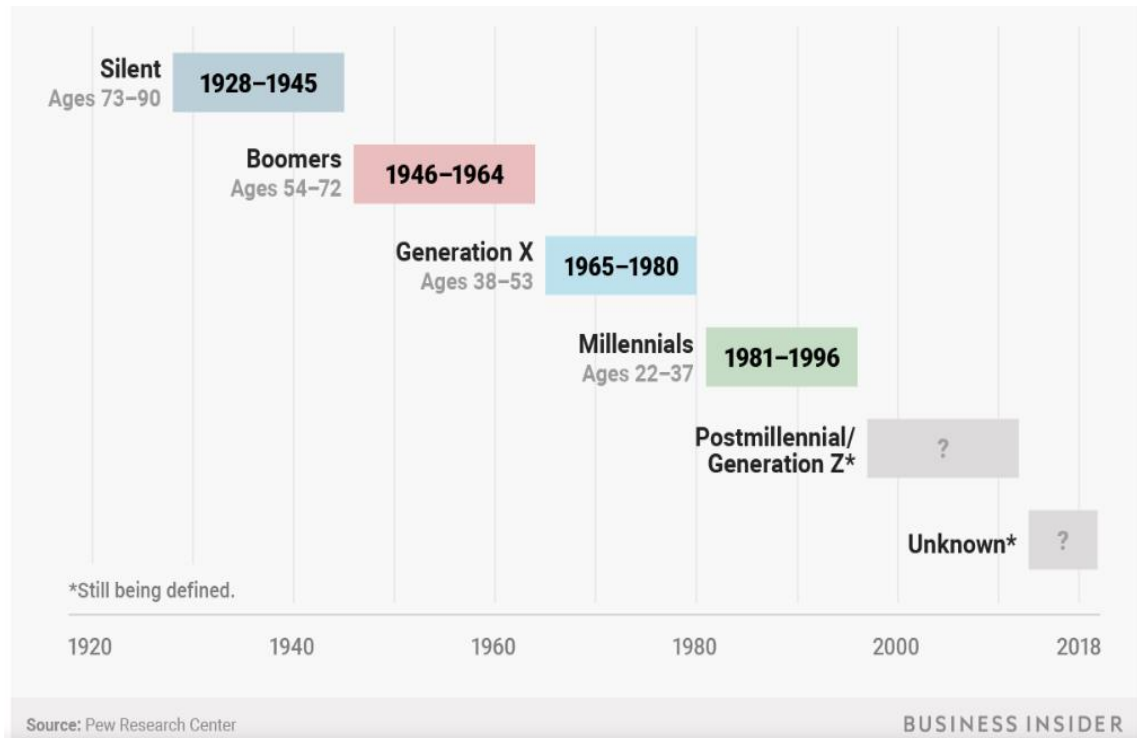
In addition, each country goes through different defining moments and events that influence its citizens' values and beliefs (Schewe & Noble, 2000). Factors such as race, gender, social status and geography can also influence individuals of a cohort (Schewe &

Noble, 2000). Rani and Samuel (2016) indicate that cultural and socioeconomic factors also play roles in shaping the generation’s personality. Given the influential factors and unique events each country experiences, it appears that the concept of the generational cohort will vary worldwide. Overall, however, it is clear that generational differences do exist (Schuman & Scott, 1989), and generational differences lead to different consumer purchasing patterns (Eastman et al., 2012). Hence, brands and marketers must have substantial knowledge about each generation.

The use of the label for generational cohorts is well-established among marketers and researchers, making it easy and convenient to identify the key characteristics of the segments using a simple term. There are well-recognised generational labels such as Baby Boomers, Generation X (Gen X), Generation Y (Gen Y) and Millennials (Eastman & Liu, 2012; Markert, 2004; Rani & Samuel, 2016). Following this trend forecast, the next generation after Gen Y will be Generation Z (Williams, 2015a) or Post-Millennials (Dimock, 2018). Some generational names and their birth year variations can be seen as follows. **Table 3.1:** Generation names and birth years.

Arsenault (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Veterans, 1933–1943 - Baby Boomers, 1944–1960 - Generation Xers, 1961–1980 - Generation Nexters, 1981–2000
Berkup (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditionalists, 1900–1945 - Baby Boomers, 1946–1964 - Generation X, 1965–1979 - Generation Y, 1980–1994 - Generation Z, 1995–
Half (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Baby Boomers, 1946–1964 - Generation Xers, 1965–1977 - Generation Yers, 1978–1989 - Generation Zers, 1990–1999
Nichols & Wright (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Silent Generation or Traditionalists, 1928–1945 - Baby Boomers, 1946–1964 - Generation X, 1965–1980 - Millennials or Generation Y, 1981–1995 - Generation Z, 1996–present

Figure 3.1: Generations by birth year.



Source: Loria and Lee (2018).

The name and birth year of each generation varies among researchers and across regions and fields (see also **Appendix A**). Given the purpose of this study, however, it is not necessary to engage in a larger argument concerning birth years and generation names. In this study, the term Generation Z or Gen Z will be used to indicate people born between 1995 and 2010 (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

3.3 Definitions and characteristics of Generation Z

3.3.1 Defining Gen Z

There is no definite agreement on the birth year of Generation Z. Tulgan (2013) defines Generation Z as those born between 1990 and 1999, while Diu (2015) refers to Generation Z as the children born between the mid-1990s and 2001. Asthana (2008) categorises Generation Z as those born after 2002. Among others, Merriman (2015) describes them as the group born between 1997 and 2003. The most common birth period starts from the mid-1990s or the early 2000s (see **Appendix A**).

Generation Z has been labelled alternatively as the iPad generation (Sydney Morning Herald, 2011), screenagers (Wallop, 2014) or the first true digital natives (Miller, 2016). Additional names that have been assigned to Generation Z include the ‘iGeneration’ (associated with Apple’s launch of the iPod in 2001, iPhone in 2007 and iPad in 2010;

Berkup, 2014), Generation Net, the 21st Century generation (Kapil & Roy, 2014), mobile generation (Özkan & Solmaz, 2015a), Plurals and Generation Next (Duffett, 2017), to name just a few (see also **Appendix A**). Born into the era of wireless internet and hyperlinks, members of Generation Z are only a few clicks or swipes away from any information and knowledge. Despite their various names, they share one significant common aspect: they have never experienced a world without the internet, smartphones and social media (Roberts, 2016; Scott, 2016). Growing up in the age of email, smartphones, touch screen electronic devices and several social media platforms, video game consoles, emojis and six-second videos (Wiedmer, 2015; Williams, 2015b), the generation exhibits many similarities but is not a homogenous group and should not be treated like one (Brown, 2017; Gomez et al., 2018; Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). The following section will provide an in-depth discussion of Gen Z and its characteristics.

3.3.2 Gen Z and its characteristics

Euromonitor (2018b) identifies five main characteristics of Gen Z: digital natives, individualistic, pragmatic, open-minded and socially responsible. These characteristics are defined further in the subsections that follow.

3.3.2.1 Gen Z is the generation of digital natives

The term ‘digital natives’ refers to individuals born into or brought up with exposure to technology and the digital world (Helsper & Eynon, 2010; Prensky, 2001). Commonly described as having been born between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, Gen Z’s members are perceived to be tech-savvy and have a comfort level with the virtual world because the internet existed prior to their birth (Wood, 2013). For this reason, Gen Z is believed to have a high expectation in terms of better technological products (Wood, 2013), instant accessibility (Malison, 2015) and the power to control technology such as skipping ads (Handley, 2017). According to Brown (2017), members of Gen Z express more positive attitudes towards skippable ads. They also make more effort to block ads by installing ad-blocking software on their desktops and mobiles (Brown, 2017). Members of Gen Z exhibit some distinctive traits due to early exposure to the internet, whereas older generations experienced the development of the internet and learned to use it at later stages of their lives.

3.3.2.2 Gen Z is socially responsible

Montana and Petit (2008) believe that members of Generation Z will be the most environmentally friendly and will have a very high level of distrust towards corporations. Similarly, research by Kamenidou et al. (2018) shows that despite having quality

assurance or certification labels on fruit products, Gen Z lacks trust in quality assurance labels. This generation appears to be pragmatic (Grow & Yang, 2018) and conscious of brands (Malison, 2015), which is why it is relevant to investigate Gen Z's scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

It is believed that Gen Z's members are greatly concerned with the environment (Barbiroglio, 2019; Patel, 2017). They learn about green activities through formal and informal education (Noor et al., 2017). Past studies illustrate that members of Generation Z are aware of green lifestyles and their responsibility towards the environment (Noor et al., 2017; Wiedmer, 2015), which may explain their intention to buy environmentally friendly products (Noor et al. 2017). According to Euromonitor (2018b), Gen Z consumers are the next consumer generation who are serious about social and environmental issues. This desire is reflected in the increase in the global retail value of ethical labels between 2015 and 2020 (See **Figure 3.2**), in which Gen Z consumers are predicted to be leaders in buying organic and ethical products hoping they can influence others to make a better world.

Figure 3.2: Global retail values of ethical labels, 2015–2020.

Socially responsible: ethical and health-conscious consumers



Source: Euromonitor (2018b).

As consumers, Generation Z has shown its product preferences and purchase intention considering environmental matters. It is important to note that Gen Z's concern about the environment and their buying intentions and behaviour indicate a socially responsible trait.

Budac (2015) explains that Gen Z is more socially responsible due to information availability, making them more aware of problems such as climate change and terrorism. Young people like members of Gen Z have access to various digital sources; they acquire knowledge from different sources and are more knowledgeable about brands (Cheung et al., 2018; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). This reality means today's businesses cannot overlook the change in consumer attitudes towards society and the environment. In addition, when communicating activities within the scope of social and environmental responsibilities, companies need to consider appropriate platforms to reach the target audiences with desired intentions. More importantly, because members of Gen Z are aware of environmental issues thanks to the information available, together with their distrust towards corporations, it is relevant to investigate Gen Z's attitudes and behaviours towards corporations' social and environmental initiatives.

3.3.2.3 Gen Z is pragmatic

Pragmatism is one of the remarkable traits identified by many researchers based on Gen Z's actions in real-life situations. Members of Gen Z want to be seen as an up-to-date generation (Noor et al., 2017), but they also show a willingness to help, to support those who are weaker and those in need (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2016). Growing up facing the global economic crisis in 2008, members of Gen Z are more entrepreneurial because they want to have better control over their finances (Lipman, 2017; Premack, 2018). Due to the surrounding environment, Gen Z appears to desire to make the world a better place (Gibbons, 2018). These are the reflections of the pragmatic trait of Gen Z, whereby members of this young generation act accordingly based on the actual needs around them.

Generation Z is passionate about social change (Scott, 2016, as cited in Grow & Yang, 2018). As a result, they are more likely to be motivated by a social cause (Gibbons, 2018). Consequently, philanthropic and other social responsibility programmes can grab Gen Z's attention and strengthen the brand and consumer relationship among this consumer group (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2016). Hessekiel (2018) also notes that good causes are a valuable way for companies to connect with Gen Z. Recall Gen Z is also brand conscious and highly distrustful towards corporations, which connects with the goal of this study to investigate Gen Z's attitudes towards social responsibility programmes, specifically plastic packaging recycling.

3.3.2.4 Gen Z is open-minded and not loyal to brands

Generation Z has been claimed to be the most multicultural generation yet (Taylor, 2016). They are described as the first truly global generation because they welcome the idea of

diversity as part of their lives – from gender to age, culture and race (Dill, 2015; Thomas & Srinivasan, 2016). Members of Gen Z have had internet access available to them since birth, meaning that they can openly and freely communicate with people from all over the globe. Members of Gen Z are also brand sensitive, but they are not brand-loyal consumers (Mohamed, 2018; Wood, 2013). Instead, they expect brands, businesses and retailers to be loyal to them (Kapusy & Lógó, 2017). Cruz et al. (2017) report that Generation Z demands appreciation from brands.

As can be seen, being open-minded and not brand-loyal are some of the unique traits that have been identified among researchers. It appears that Gen Z is a very different generational cohort with some distinct characteristics; brands need to be able to understand how to approach and appeal to this upcoming consumer group. It is crucial to acknowledge that Gen Z offers many opportunities and challenges.

3.3.2.5 Gen Z is individualistic

Generation Z seeks brand and product experiences (Kapusy & Lógó, 2017; Mohammed, 2018; Wood, 2013) and cares about using brands to express their identities (Malison, 2015), reflecting their individualism. As a result, relevant brands and service providers should allow Gen Z to use products and services to express their individuality. More importantly, within the scope of this study, it may be difficult to communicate CSR initiatives to Gen Z because of their desire for something to which they can personally relate in order to express themselves. This trait poses a challenge for brands in terms of CSR communications. Brands and retailers might be misunderstood if they do not communicate to members of Gen Z in the right way, and Gen Z individuals do not find personal relevance in the actions of brands and retailers.

In general, there is a growing interest in Gen Z, the next powerful consumer group with five key traits commonly identified by researchers, including digital native, pragmatic, socially responsible, open-minded and individualistic. As the newest consumer group, it is challenging to draw a complete picture of this young generation and their attitudes and behaviours towards corporations. In particular, many members of Gen Z are still young and rely on financial support from their parents, meaning that they have not fully developed shopping behaviours and attitudes towards brands. However, knowing their key characteristics is essential to understanding and capturing their attention and capital.

3.3.2.6 How does Gen Z differ from previous generations?

Generation Z is different from previous generations in many ways (Lanier, 2017; Mohammed, 2018; Özkan & Solmaz, 2015b). Firstly, the most significant factor that differentiates them from previous generations is the internet. They did not witness the start of technology but were born into it (Jenkins, 2017). As a result, they are more digital and socially connected than previous generations (Ruangkanjanases & Wongprasopchai, 2017). Secondly, Gen Zers are more difficult to engage (Brown, 2017), and it is more challenging to retain their attention (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018) unless stimulation occurs (Duffet, 2017). This stumbling block could be due to having born into a world of limitless choices in terms of media and content (Southgate, 2017) and having multiple motivations (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Thirdly, Gen Z is the generation that makes more of an effort to avoid ads than any previous generations (Handley, 2017; Southgate, 2017), and, on average, they skip ads faster than Gen X (Brown, 2017).

Another significant difference between Gen Z and previous generations is that it has always had better options in the marketplace (Wood, 2013). With instant internet access since birth, a massive range of products and services has been accessible to Gen Z from the early stages of life compared to older generations who witnessed the development of the internet as teenagers or adults. Having 24/7 access to information (Cheung et al., 2018), Generation Z individuals have a higher expectation of brands than previous generations (Mohammed, 2018). They are perceived as tech-savvy (Mohammed, 2018; Thomas & Srinivasan, 2016) and brand-savvy (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Taken altogether, this further reinforces the relationship between significant external events (in this case, having born into the internet era) and distinctive generational cohort traits, values, preferences, attitudes and behaviours in light of generational cohort theory.

3.3.3 Engaging with Gen Z

Gen Z is the second largest demographic owning an iPhone (Kapil & Roy, 2014). They actively live their lives, socialise and make purchases on smartphones (Kapusy & Lógó, 2017). Some use YouTube as their search tool (Kapil & Roy, 2014). In fact, according to Mintel (2017a), YouTube has become one of the winners in term of increasing daily usage, which is mainly driven by young consumers aged 16–24 years old (the birth years of Generation Z). Among those surveyed, the number of people who use YouTube several times a day increased from 26% in 2016 to 35% in 2017 (Mintel, 2017a). Generation Z's members are heavy users of mobile apps and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat (Brown, 2017; Malison, 2015).

Importantly for this study, Generation Z uses social media as a learning tool about brands (Mintel, 2017b). It is essential to highlight that the use of social media platforms among consumers can affect several factors such as habits, consumers' expectations, engagement with brands, purchase behaviours, brand loyalty, and brand value (Bolton et al., 2013). Marketers, researchers, policymakers and service providers must know which platforms are best to use for which purpose to ensure that messages appropriately target a certain consumer group. Therefore, keeping up with social media trends is considered vital for brands. However, spending so much time on social media platforms, Gen Z happens to be more suspicious about social networks and their uses (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Hence, it is necessary for brands to carefully consider CSR communications on social media networks to avoid the risk of releasing misleading communication and provoking scepticism.

According to Kapusy and Lógó (2017), Gen Z's members prioritise the speed of accessing information over its accuracy. From a practical implication perspective, brands and marketers may now have many communication tools. However, it is essential to figure out which communication channels would reach Gen Z more efficiently due to their preference for speed over accuracy while considering the consistency of communication messages across platforms.

Being brought up in the era of advanced technology and being heavy users of smartphones (Kapusy & Lógó, 2017), Generation Z is less likely to be influenced by traditional media (Kusá & Záziková, 2016). Gen Z members appreciate high-quality visual content over texts (Baron, 2019; Southgate, 2017), which clearly indicates that marketing messages should increasingly rely on visual aspects such as images, colours and signs over words and sentences (Budac, 2015). Budac (2015) suggests that brands need to adjust to the communication style of Gen Z, which is based on visuals and interactivity.

Thomas and Srinivasan (2016) claim that members of Gen Z only have an eight-second attention span, which logically explains why Gen Z prefers information and media in small bites (Grow & Yang, 2018). Some researchers have recognised that there is a logical explanation behind the media preferences of Gen Z. For example, Thomas and Srinivasan (2016) indicate that Gen Zers are more interested in and attracted to graphics, multi-media and connected activities. Gen Z's interest in multi-media and their natural multi-tasking ability (Özkan & Solmaz, 2015b) can make it difficult for sellers and marketers to attract their attention. Indeed, there is tremendous pressure to hold their attention because Gen Z tends to absorb information quickly and immediately move on if no interactions or

stimuli occur (Williams, 2015b, as cited in Duffett, 2017). As an example, they are more likely to respond well to ads that allow involvement and interaction (Brown, 2017). Consequently, brands, sellers and retailers may have to accept this generation's short attention span and learn to adjust to their preferences in term of content and interactions. This characteristic leads to a quandary for brands and marketers seeking to communicate with Gen Z.

Regarding privacy on social media, Gen Z prefers platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram, where they have more control over the content (Premack, 2018). Spending a significant amount of time on social media networks and using them to learn about brands, companies and marketers need to balance any approach with Generation Z's desire to control the privacy and content of social media. Brands should focus their attention on platforms where this generation of consumers spends the most time and plan their media budget accordingly. More importantly, communications regarding CSR initiatives should be tailored to appeal to this generation and not lead to any misconception about the brand.

In term of purchasing influence, on the one hand, previous studies have shown that peer and social influence can impact Gen Z's buying decisions (Mohammed, 2018). In particular, these decisions are influenced by friends and family (Noor et al., 2017; Ruangkanjanases & Wongprasopchai, 2017). On the other hand, Gen Z also plays a central role in decision-making within family units regarding family spending and household purchases (Fromm, 2018; Kapusy & Lógó, 2017).

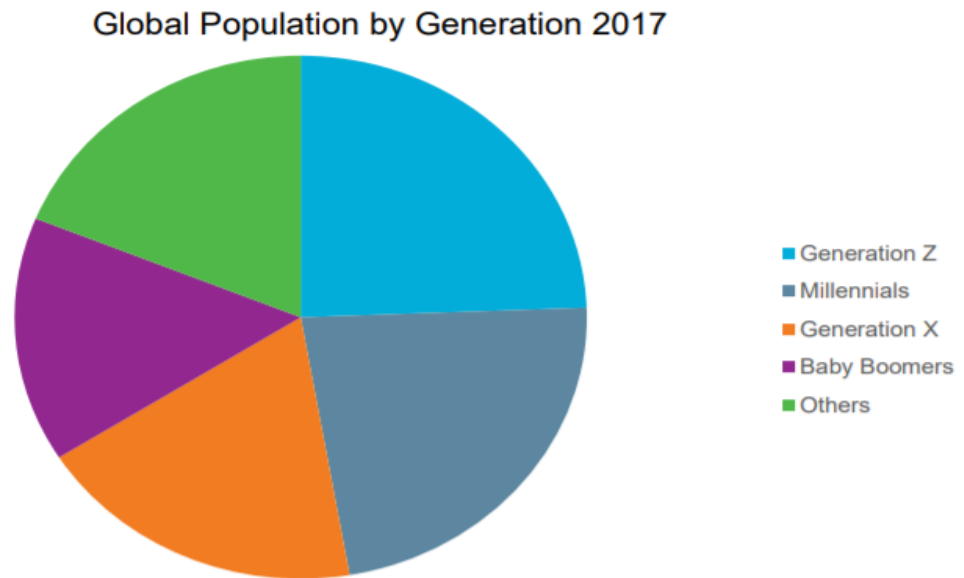
Overall, this generation represents an opportunity and should be studied and understood by marketers and brands because of their influential role across product categories (Kim & Jang, 2014). For companies, these identified characteristics are vital in tailoring their strategic marketing goals, such as communication channels and communication messages to reach the targeted market successfully. Brands keen on a generational approach in terms of market segmentation should identify and differentiate generational cohorts, mainly because it will illuminate how the current environment or certain events shape people's collective outlook (Dill, 2015; Williams, 2015b).

3.3.4 Why does Gen Z matter?

Generation Z was expected to account for approximately 40% of all US consumers by 2020 (Perlstein, 2017). They became the largest generation globally in 2019 (Spitznagel, 2020). Gen Z is the youngest but represents the largest consumer group across all

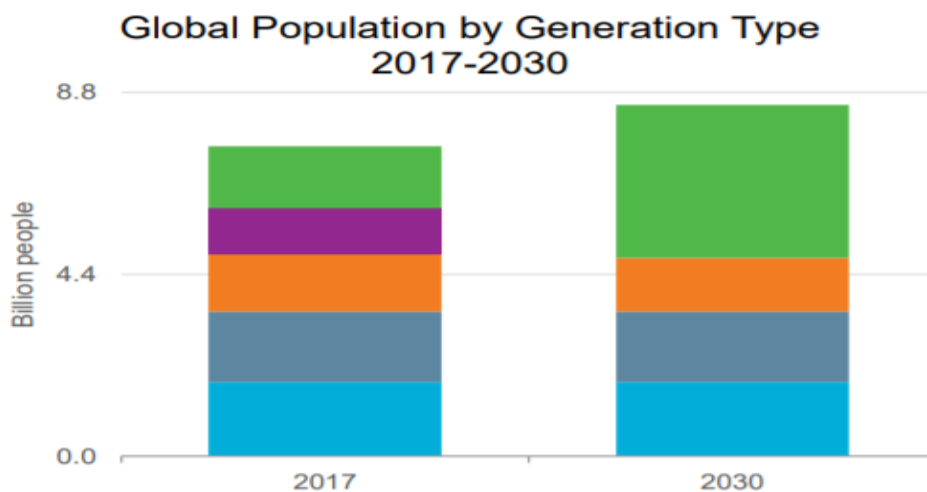
generations from 2017 through to 2030 (Euromonitor, 2018b) (See **Figure 3.3** and **Figure 3.4**).

Figure 3.3: Global population by generation, 2017.



Source: Euromonitor (2018b).

Figure 3.4: Global population by generation type, 2017–2030.



Source: Euromonitor (2018b).

Members of Gen Z are still in their tweens, teens and young adulthood, meaning that they have limited financial power. However, as they age and move to later stages of life, they will acquire more average gross income than when they were younger (See **Figure 3.5**).

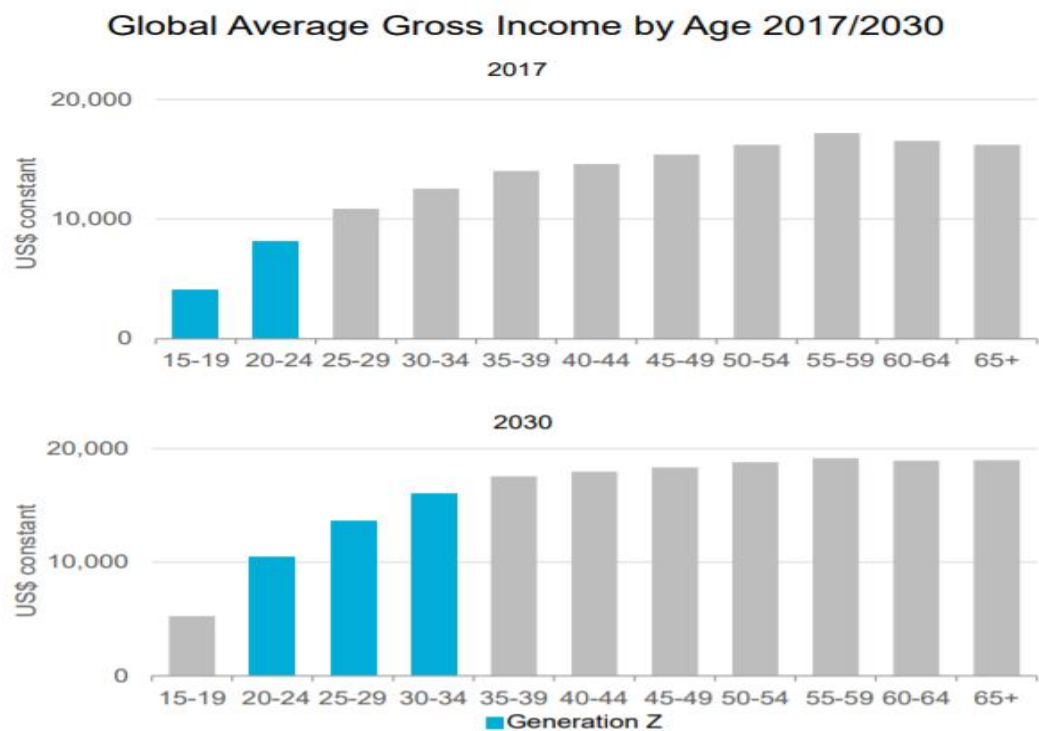
Figure 3.5: Generation Z facts and figures, 2018 and 2030.

Gen Z Facts & Figures	
2018	2030
Age (in years) 9 to 23	Age (in years) 21 to 35
Life stage Tweens Teens Young Adults	Life stage Young Adults Middle Youth
Average Gross Income (US\$ 2017 constant prices)	Average Gross Income (US\$ 2017 constant prices)
Aged 15-19: 4,111 Aged 20-24: 8,270	Aged 20-24: 10,395 Aged 25-29: 13,652 Aged 30-34: 16,073

Source: Euromonitor (2018b).

By 2030, the global average gross income of Generation Z is forecasted to increase continuously. As members of this generation grow older, they will acquire more purchasing power (See **Figure 3.6**). When it comes to payment method, brands and sellers need to consider that the younger members of Gen Z still rely on their parents' financial support for their purchases; hence various payment options or facilities can be significant to increase sales (Mohammed, 2018). The need for various payment option will shift again as members of Gen Z become more financially independent. Brands need to be aware of the life stage changes of younger and more powerful Gen Z consumers.

Figure 3.6: Global average gross income by age, 2017 and 2030.



Source: Euromonitor (2018b).

According to Godwin (2019), Gen Z’s annual global spending power is up to \$200 billion. In the UK, Gen Z accounts for one-quarter of the population (Bearne, 2015) and will be the newest and youngest workforce to enter the workplace. As a result, they will have more financial control and less reliance on parental financial support.

Given the size of this generational cohort and its promising purchasing power, Gen Z is a potential target segment for many goods. Because demands for goods are associated with the population’s characteristics (Markert, 2004), it is beneficial to understand how a generational cohort forms and its characteristics, influencing consumer behaviours. Since Generation Z has shown distinctive behaviours compared to previous generations due to having born into the internet era, there is a need to understand better how to approach them to more effectively market products and services.

3.4 Summary

The confusion in terminology between generation and cohort does exist among researchers. A generation is associated with individuals who experience the same significant events throughout their lives. In contrast, a cohort undergoes the same external events during their formative years, especially between 17–24 years of age. As a result, people share certain values and exhibit similar behaviours, attitudes and preferences that

are deeply rooted and remain unchanged over a lifetime. Despite the confusion in terminology, it is plausible to use the term generation in its historical sense, whereby the emphasis is on a group of people who share distinctive identities by having experienced the same external events around the same time interval in their lives.

Generational cohort theory provides a broader dimension in defining a generational cohort for segmentation in marketing – people who experienced the same social, cultural, political, economic and historical events during their formative years, share the same core values and exhibit similar behaviours that may persist throughout their lives (Chaney et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2011). As noted earlier, the theory has some constraints related to the construction of generational stereotypes. However, from a marketing perspective, generational cohort analysis allows companies to uncover similarities and better develop and design product and service offerings and communication strategies to appeal to given cohorts (Schewe & Meredith, 2004).

It appears that the concept of the generational cohort can be varied across cultures worldwide due to different external factors that influence individuals. There is such a fine line between the cohort effect and period effect. However, the cohort effect is more profound in the case of Gen Z because being born into the world of the internet is a very distinctive experience that members of this generation will share throughout a lifetime. The internet has been there for this generation since birth, unlike older generations who witnessed different stages of internet development and eventually adapted to technological changes.

The term Generation Z or Gen Z will be used throughout this study to indicate individuals born between the mid-1990s and 2010 (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). As noted above, five key characteristics of Gen Z have been identified by many researchers: digital natives, open-minded, socially responsible, pragmatic and individualistic. Gen Z consumers play a significant role in influencing a family's buying process and can be influenced by friends and family members. They appear to differ from previous generations in many ways, such as expectations (better technological products, brand approaches and experiences, payment methods, interactions and control over ads), communication preferences (channels, styles and content), the time needed to process information (eight seconds), personal values (use brands to express identity, intend to buy socially responsible and environmentally friendly products) and online privacy. Social media appears to be the central platform for Gen Z to communicate, socialise, search and learn about brands. Thus, it is vital for brands to build up their content and appeal to members

of Gen Z in order to retain their interest. Traditional ads can still be influential among members of Gen Z, along with social media networks. While targeting this new generation through traditional platforms, companies must accept their content preferences and integrate social networks into their communicational and promotional channels.

Due to the distinctive characteristics of the internet and technology, brands and marketers need to respond and market accordingly to the new consumer group for a long-term relationship. In addition, the size and the promising purchasing power of this young generation indicate enormous opportunities for brands and retailers to exploit. However, it is very challenging when it comes to a new generation in which individuals demand that brands appreciate and approach them first but offer no brand loyalty in return. There is a growing body of academic research about Gen Z and the growing interest of this generation among marketers. From the analyses above, it is easy to see the impacts of having born into the internet era on Gen Z's behaviours, attitudes, personal values and preferences. Gen Z's key characteristics explain their attitudes and behaviours towards corporations (distrust) and environmentally friendly products (intend to buy and consider buying). Due to their knowledge of green lifestyles and obligation towards the environment together with high levels of distrust towards companies, it is relevant to investigate attitudes and behaviours of Gen Z towards the chosen socially responsible business practice: plastic packaging recycling.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed Gen Z's distinctive characteristics and the importance of understanding them as a future consumer group. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research philosophy underlying this project then moves to discussions of research paradigms, research methods, research approaches and sampling strategies. Under the sampling strategies section, a justification of the sample size of the main study and the pilot study will be provided. A detailed description of the main study's participant profiles will also be included. The chapter continues with a discussion of data collection and the data analysis method used to address the nature of the research and answer the research questions.

4.2 Research philosophy

A research philosophy contains 'a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge' (Saunders et al., 2009, p.124). These assumptions shape and guide the research process and affect research strategies and methods (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Different paradigms are based upon different ontological and epistemological assumptions (Scotland, 2012).

Ontology: concerns the nature of reality, existence and being and how it influences people behaviours (Saunders et al., 2009, 2015). Because the ontological assumption is concerned with the nature of reality (Lincoln & Guba, 2013), the researcher takes a position regarding their perception of how things are and how things work (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). Ontology philosophical assumption helps a researcher examine their underlying belief system about the nature of reality, enabling the researcher to make sense of the collected data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Two basic ontological positions are objectivism/realism and subjectivism/constructionism/relativism (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Crotty, 1998; Denscombe, 2010; Levers, 2013).

Epistemology: concerns assumptions about the nature of human knowledge, such as its nature, forms and how it is acquired, validated and communicated to others (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Saunders et al., 2009, 2015). Kamal (2019, p. 1390) describes epistemology as the process by which investigators come to know the truth or, in other words, 'how we know what we know'. Epistemology emphasises the nature of human knowledge and comprehension, and a researcher positions themselves in the research context to discover what is new, broadening the understanding of what is known in their

field of research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Two broad epistemological stances are positivism and interpretivism- constructivism (Antwi & Hamza, 2015) or objectivism and subjectivism (Levers, 2013).

There are several reasons for adopting an interpretivist philosophical perspective, which has a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology (Levers, 2013). First, the ontological stance of interpretivism is relativism, and it acknowledges the existence of multiple realities that are socially constructed by individuals (Ryan, 2018; Scotland, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2019). Individuals perceive the world differently and form their reality of the world based on their interactions with others (Khan, 2014). Brigitte (2017) suggests that human behaviours and interactions are not the same. Therefore, it is irrational to assume that all Gen Z individuals born in the digital era can interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds and will perceive and evaluate socially responsible practices the same way. In addition, interpretivism recognises that human beings have consciousness or a mind which interprets experiences, events and constructs meaning from them (Wisker, 2008). For interpretivist researchers, value-free knowledge is impossible because the researchers assert their beliefs into what to research, how to do it, and how to interpret the data gathered (Scotland, 2012). Moreover, interpretivism yields insights into behaviours and explains actions from the participant's point of view (**Table 4.1**); hence, interpretivism is most suitable for studying socially responsible initiatives from Gen Z's perspective instead of the researcher's perspective.

Table 4.1: Comparison of Interpretivism and Positivism paradigms.

Interpretivism/ Constructivism	Aims at understanding a phenomenon from an individual's perspective, their interactions with others, and their social, historical and cultural background	Multiple and interrelated realities and multiple truths	Value-free knowledge is impossible	Qualitative data is generated
Positivism	Aims to formulate laws that help with prediction and generalisation	Singular reality, only one objective and fixed reality	The researcher is expected to remain detached, neutral and objective	Numeric data is often generated

Sources: Haase and Myers (1988); Kamal (2019); Karatas et al. (2010); Khan (2014); Kivunja and Kuyini (2017); Neuman (2014); Rehman and Alharthi (2016); Ryan, 2018; Sale et al. (2002); Saunders et al. (2019); Scotland (2012).

The study did not apply positivism, as the generalizability of positivism means that researchers are 'able to observe occurrences in the particular phenomenon they have studied and be able to generalise about what can be expected elsewhere in the world' (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 31). Little is known about CSR scepticism among Gen Z in the UK, and Gen Z is different from the generation before it, Millennials (Farrell & Phungsoonthorn, 2020; Talmon, 2019). Additionally, the world population is over 7 billion (UNFPA, 2020), and there are thousands of different languages spoken around the world (BBC, 2014). Language has a vital role in how culture influences self-perceptions versus perceptions of others (Kastanakis & Voyer, 2014). Ji and Yap (2016, p. 105) indicate that culture influences 'how people attend to the environment, perceive others, memorize and learn information, and make judgments'. Thus, it is unreasonable to formulate laws for universal prediction and generalisation purposes due to language and cultural differences. Generalising the results observed from this study elsewhere regarding Gen Z's perceptions, evaluations and scepticism towards brands and retailers is irrational. In addition, the positivist approach is often used in quantitative research (Cooper & White, 2012), which makes it unsuited to this qualitative study. Critical and interpretivist approaches are often used in qualitative research (Cooper & White, 2012). However, the critical approach focuses on answering 'how' and 'why' questions (Sturgiss & Clark, 2020), while the current research addresses 'how' and 'what' questions.

Positivism, interpretivism and critical realism (CR) differ regarding ontology, epistemology and methodology (Mingers, 2006, as cited in Sorrell, 2018). Regarding data collection methods, no precise method for CR is specified (Fletcher, 2017); instead, CR embraces single, multi-method and mixed-method research (Khazem, 2018). CR does not have prescribed methods to investigate which research problems (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2018; Taylor, 2018). Epistemologically, CR focuses on explaining the causal mechanism behind social events (Mingers, 2006, as cited in Sorrell, 2018; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2018); this is irrelevant for the current study, which aims to understand Gen Z’s perceptions and evaluations of CSR initiatives to understand their scepticism towards CSR.

4.3 Research methods

The following table shows the distinctions between qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

Table 4.2: Differences between qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

Method	Aims and focus	Data collection
Qualitative	Focuses on understanding the way humans view their social world. Emphasises processes and meanings. Studies and interprets phenomena in their natural settings from the perspective of the people being studied.	Participant observation, case studies, in-depth and focus group interviews, field notes, words and open-ended questions.
Quantitative	Seeks measurements, analyses, explanations and predictions that are replicable to other places and people.	Surveys, experiments, statistical analysis and econometrics.
Mixed	Seeks to address complicated research questions and find comprehensive answers for exploratory and confirmatory questions in a single study.	Use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in data collection, analysis and inference techniques within a single study.

Sources: Bryman and Bell, 2011; Ivankova and Wingo, 2018; Mayer, 2015; Myers, 2020; Sale et al., 2002; Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017; Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007; Thomas, 2003.

Table 4.2 illustrates that the qualitative method is suitable to study and interpret socially responsible initiatives from the perspective of the chosen studied population, Gen Z. In addition, the qualitative approach is most suitable for in-depth, exploratory research where the research topic is new and little research has been published (Myers, 2020). Due to a shortage of empirical studies of Generation Z (Priporas, 2020; Priporas et al., 2017, 2020b) or any study that investigates scepticism among Gen Z towards socially responsible initiatives in the UK context, a qualitative research design is used (Priporas

& Mylona, 2008; Silverman, 2016; Tesch, 1990; Yin, 2011). This methodology is suitable for the holistic perspective and the nature of the research questions, whereby analysis is conducted seeking the insights of natural settings or contexts of whoever or whatever is being studied (Suter, 2012). Additionally, qualitative research is compatible with the interpretivist approach (Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Bahari, 2010).

The qualitative method uses in-depth interviews as a method for data collection, which is ideal for understanding an experience or event from the point of view of participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Hammarberg et al., 2016). Lowhorn (2007) claims that qualitative research is credible and trustworthy. As a result, qualitative methodology is expected to give solid and detailed conclusions and recommendations (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). Moreover, the qualitative method focuses not only on the ‘what’ but also on the ‘how’ (Teti et al., 2020), which makes it highly applicable for this current study as it investigates ‘how’ Gen Z individuals perceive and evaluate CSR initiatives and ‘what’ influences their scepticism towards CSR initiatives. The quantitative method is unsuitable as the study does not seek measurements, analyses, explanations or predictions replicable for other places and people. The mixed-method approach also does not fit in with the exploratory questions of the current study.

4.4 Research approach

The following table displays the differences between three approaches, inductive, deductive and abductive.

Table 4.3: Inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning and abductive reasoning.

Inductive reasoning	Informed by interpretive philosophy	‘Characterised by a search for patterns’ within the data collected about a phenomenon, then categorises them into broader themes and generates theory from it.	Moves from data to theory/ from the concrete to the abstract.	Theory is built based on data.
Deductive reasoning	Underpinned by positivist philosophy	Starts with a theoretical base (often derived from existing literature), then self-generated hypotheses are developed and are tested with specific data.	Moves from the general to the specific.	Falsify or verify a theory.
Abductive reasoning	Underpinned by pragmatism, postmodernism or critical realism	Known for its creative process of ‘producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence’.	Moves back and forth between theory and data or between inductive and deductive approaches.	Theory building or modification.

Sources: Adams et al., 2014; Graneheim et al., 2017, p. 30; Mitchell, 2018; Neuman, 2014; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Saunders et al., 2015, 2019; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 167; Tracy, 2020; Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018.

The current study adopts an inductive approach. For the quantitative study, the path is more deductive, whereas a qualitative study adopts a more inductive path in the research process (Atieno, 2009; Creswell, 2003; Mitchell, 2018; Neuman, 2014). More importantly, the inductive approach ‘is most suitable where little or nothing is known about the study phenomenon’ (Burnard et al., 2008, p. 429). Due to a scarcity of studies about Gen Z in the marketing field (Priporas et al., 2017, 2020b) and the lack of research on scepticism towards other forms of CSR, such as socially responsible initiatives among brands and retailers in the UK context, an inductive approach is more suitable. Deductive reasoning has its shortcomings – it fails to capture how people think and respond to their environments (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018), making it unsuitable for capturing Gen Z individuals’ perceptions and evaluations of brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives. Abduction proceeds ‘from facts to an explanatory hypothesis’ (Awuzie & McDermott, 2017, p. 358). More explicitly, abduction produces a new hypothesis based

on surprising research evidence for which more observations are needed (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Considering the exploratory nature of the research, which aims to understand a phenomenon from the chosen population’s perspective, the principle of abduction is not applicable.

4.5 Sampling strategies

The sampling method proceeds differently and has a different purpose depending on the study (quantitative versus qualitative; Neuman, 2014). There are two sampling methods: probability and non-probability (**Table 4.4**).

Table 4.4: Sampling methods.

	Probability	Non-probability
Methods	‘Simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling’, multiphase sampling and multistage sampling.	Convenience, quota and purposive samples.
Differences	Gold standard in sampling methodology for producing a representative sample. Every individual has an equal chance of being selected.	Ideal for exploratory studies and cannot produce representative samples that represent the entire population. Not everyone has an equal chance of being selected.

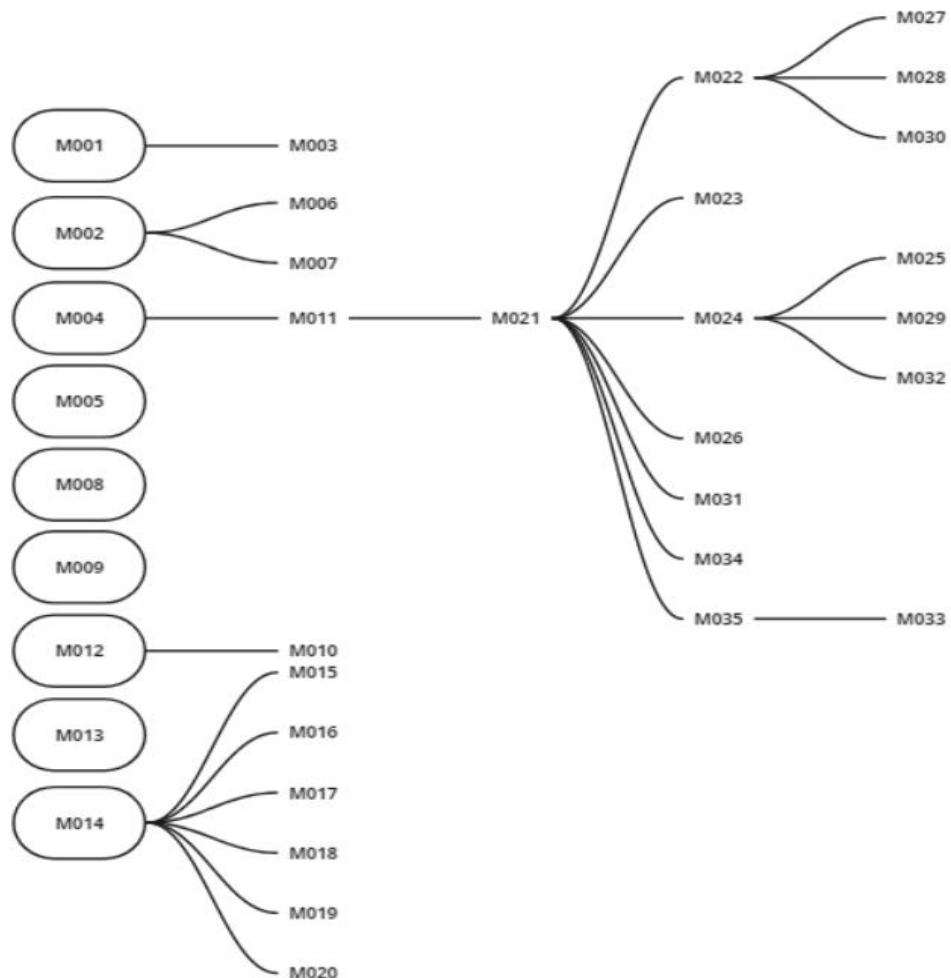
Sources: Acharya et al., 2013; Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 1–2; Neuman, 2014.

Purposive sampling and the judgemental sampling technique were used to select research participants based on the research criteria. Purposive sampling or a judgemental sampling strategy is used when the researcher has specific requirements about the sample and deliberately selects subjects who meet the requirements and are best-suited to address the research questions (Frey, 2018; Panacek & Thompson, 2007). Purposive sampling is based on the researcher’s judgement of who is qualified and is used when there are limited numbers of people who can serve as primary data sources due to the nature of the exploratory research design, research aims and research objectives (Reddy & Ramasamy, 2016; Taherdoost, 2016).

Common in qualitative research (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018), snowball sampling is often used to reach a difficult to access or hidden population (Tracy, 2020) or is used to research individual characteristics in a given population (Handcock & Gile, 2011). Initially, the researcher starts with a personal or professional contact within the population to identify suitable individuals, often referred to as ‘seeds’ (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018) from which

additional participants are recruited (Acharya et al., 2013; Parker et al., 2019). In this study, the researcher started with her personal connections and also contacted her professional network. Snowball sampling faces criticism regarding sample diversity which can be overcome with diverse seeds (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Tracy, 2020) (see **Figure 4.1**). To maximise the diversity of the sample, the researcher searched for a maximum variation among participants based on gender, age and level of education. In this process, samples are collected until the data reaches a saturation point (Naderifar et al., 2017) or once the target sample size has been reached (Parker et al., 2019). In the case of this study, it was when it reached the target sample size, which will be explained in the next section.

Figure 4.1: The recruitment network of snowball sampling, starting with nine seeds (main study).



4.5.1 Sample size

4.5.1.1 Main study sample size

The sample size in qualitative research is small and is not meant to represent the population as a whole (Sale et al., 2002). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) recommend a good sample size range from 15 to 20 respondents. According to Boddy (2016), the existing literature suggests that a qualitative sample size of 50 is considered too large, while 20–30 is considered small. Consequently, Boddy (2016) recommends a sample size of 30 qualitative interviews. Britten (1995) indicates that sizeable qualitative research involves no more than 50 or 60 interviews. De Ruyter and Scholl (1998) argue that the most common sample sizes range from 15–40. Similarly, DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) summarise that most researchers use semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis, and the sample size ranges from 10 to 40. This summary clarifies that there are no rules in sample size calculations in qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Priporas et al., 2012). In qualitative research, the sample size should lead to an appropriate analysis and conclusion (Saunders et al., 2009). To gather an in-depth understanding of a population (different perspectives on the same phenomenon), a sample size of 30-35 participants was used.

The participants were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Generation Z adults aged between 18 and 25 as of 2020 (between January and June).
- British residents living in the UK.
- Have engaged in shopping activities with brands and retailers in the UK, both online and offline.
- Have encountered plastic packaging from brands and retailers in the UK while shopping.

4.6.1.2 Pilot study sample size

Based on the existing literature, Connelly (2008) suggests that the sample size of a pilot study should be 10% of the sample size planned for the main study. Accordingly, if the sample for the main study is between 30 and 50, the sample size for the pilot study is 3–5 based on the 10% calculation formulation. In a qualitative study in the CRM domain, Webb and Mohr (1998) use a sample of four pilot interviews for the main study of 48 interviews, of which only 44 interviews were usable. It works out as approximate 8% of the final study. In a qualitative study of CRM scepticism, Priporas et al. (2019) also use

a pilot sample of three participants for 26 interviews in the main study. Moreover, in recent qualitative research using in-depth interviews, Priporas et al. (2020a) consult a sample of three to pre-test the readability and content relevancy of the interview guide concerning research objectives. Based on the above discussion and the justification of the 30–35 planned sample size for the main study, three participants were consulted for the pilot test.

The sample of the pilot study was collected using a convenience sampling method. The researcher used personal contacts to recruit participants (current UK residents) who met the research criteria (as discussed above). The researcher conducted a total of three interviews for the pilot study. The participants' age ranges from 18 to 24 as of 2019.

4.5.2 Main study respondent profiles

This project investigates consumer scepticism towards CSR among Gen Z in the UK; therefore, Gen Z adults aged between 18 and 25 were recruited. A total of 35 people participated in the study. The participants' age ranges from 18 to 25 as of 2020 (between January and June). Among 35 participants, approximate 29% were aged between 22–25 and about 71% were aged between 18–21 at the time of the study. Of 35 participants, 13 males (37% of the total sample) and 22 females (63% of the total sample) took part. In terms of the level of education, 19 people (about 54%) classified school/further education (sixth form/colleges) as their highest qualification and another 15 people (about 43%) classified higher education as their highest qualification. See **Table 4.5** below.

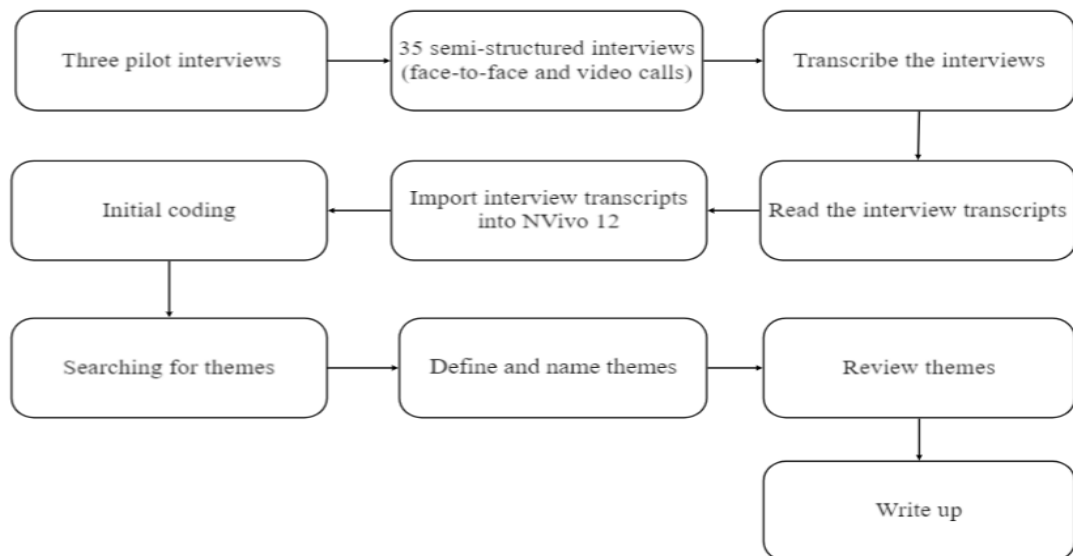
Table 4.5: Participants' profile (main study) imported from NVivo 12 software.

Participants	Age Group	Area of living	Level of education	Occupation	Gender
Cases\\M001	22-25	London	School/further education	Marketing employee	M
Cases\\M002	22-25	London	Higher education	IT employee	M
Cases\\M003	22-25	London	School/further education	Retail employee	F
Cases\\M004	18-21	Luton	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M005	22-25	West Sussex	Higher education	Law employee	F
Cases\\M006	22-25	London	Higher education	IT employee	M
Cases\\M007	22-25	London	Higher education	IT employee	M
Cases\\M008	22-25	London	Higher education	University student	F
Cases\\M009	18-21	Rickmansworth	School/further education	School leaver, hospitality employee	F
Cases\\M010	22-25	Swindon	School/further education	Sales employee	M
Cases\\M011	18-21	Luton	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M012	22-25	Swindon	Higher education	Marketing employee	F
Cases\\M013	18-21	London	Higher education	University student	M
Cases\\M014	18-21	Swindon	Higher education	University student, finance employee	F
Cases\\M015	18-21	Nottingham	Higher education	University student	F
Cases\\M016	18-21	Swindon	Higher education	University student	F
Cases\\M017	22-25	Swindon	School/further education	Finance employee	F
Cases\\M018	18-21	Nottingham	Higher education	University student	M
Cases\\M019	18-21	Manchester	Higher education	University student	M
Cases\\M020	18-21	Wolverhampton	Higher education	University student	F
Cases\\M021	18-21	Luton	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M022	18-21	Buckinghamshire	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M023	18-21	Luton	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M024	18-21	Milton Keynes	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M025	18-21	Milton Keynes	School/further education	School leaver	M
Cases\\M026	18-21	Luton	School/further education	School leaver	M
Cases\\M027	18-21	Great missenden	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M028	18-21	Aylesbury	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M029	18-21	Milton Keynes	Higher education	University student	F
Cases\\M030	18-21	Aylesbury	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M031	18-21	Peterborough	School/further education	School leaver, retail employee	F
Cases\\M032	18-21	Birmingham	Higher education	University student	M
Cases\\M033	18-21	Norwich	School/further education	School leaver	F
Cases\\M034	18-21	Luton	School/further education	School leaver	M
Cases\\M035	18-21	Luton	School/further education	School leaver	M

4.6 Data collection and analysis

Figure 4.2 below summarises the data collection and data analysis processes of this study.

Figure 4.2: A summary of data collection and data analysis processes.



4.6.1 Data collection

4.6.1.1 In-depth interviews

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, which concerns scepticism among Gen Z individuals towards a form of CSR initiatives, an in-depth interview is used to gather this information. In-depth interviews help provide detailed information and explore issues (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Similarly, Priporas and Vangelinos (2008) state that in-depth interviews are considered the best way to obtain information in-depth and help lessen the distance between the interviewer and the respondent (Pantano & Priporas, 2016; Priporas & Poimenidis, 2008). In addition, in-depth interviews are used ‘to understand a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective’ (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 499), which makes this technique ideal for capturing Gen Z individuals’ perceptions and evaluations of socially responsible practices among brands and retailers. In-depth interviews are compatible with the research method chosen for this study, as explained above (section 4.4).

4.6.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative interviews can be semi-structured or unstructured (Edwards & Holland, 2013). With unstructured interviews, researchers ask as few questions as possible, whereas, with semi-structured interviews, the researchers have specific questions to ask, which allows the researchers to compare information from other interviews (Dawson, 2009). In seeking to gather perceptions, attitudes and experiences from individuals, data

will be collected through a semi-structured interview whereby ‘a guide is used with questions and topics that must be covered’ (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). A semi-structured interview is designed to focus on the topics of interest and is flexible, allowing rich data and additional insights to be gained (Crowther & Lancaster, 2008). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher(s) to probe when appropriate to obtain more detailed responses from respondents, and such probing helps achieve the research objectives (Gray, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews in qualitative research often include open-ended questions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) and discussions that remain flexible (McCracken, 1998) to learn about the individuals’ experiences and perspectives on particular issues (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, semi-structured interviews are best to explore and uncover the perceptions, evaluations, attitudes and beliefs of Generation Z towards CSR practices performed by brands, manufacturers and retailers.

The open-ended semi-structured interview guide, with ten central open-ended questions and four demographic questions, was used to select and screen participants who met the selection criteria, as discussed in the sample size section. Sub-questions were only asked if participants’ answers did not cover the topics of the initial questions (Guest et al., 2006). Kelly (2010) refers to sub-questions as prompts and follow-up questions and indicates their importance in guiding the interviews towards more robust explanations and ensuring that specific dimensions of a question are explored in all interviews. The prompts and follow-up questions are included in **Appendix B**.

The interviews follow ethical guidelines such as ‘no harm’, ‘informed consent’, ‘anonymity’ and ‘honesty’ (Allmark et al., 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015, Priporas et al., 2017).

The following **Table 4.6** indicates the connection among research objectives (ROs), Research Questions (RQs), and interview questions.

Table 4.6: The connections among RQ(s), RO(s) and interview questions.

RQs, ROs	Essence of the interview questions	Sources of interview questions (Adapted from)
RQ1	1. Perceptions on brands and retailers' current socially responsible initiatives	None (N/A).
RQ1, RO1	2. Information source(s) where Gen Z learns about socially responsible initiatives	Bailey, 2004; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000; Yoon et al., 2006.
RQ2, RO1, 2	3. Trusted/distrusted information sources or platforms and reasons	Obermiller & Spanegemberg, 1998, 2000; Yoon et al., 2006.
RQ2, RO1, 2	4. Criteria to trust brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives	Bae, 2018, 2020; Elving, 2012; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009a; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009; Yoon et al., 2006.
RQ1, RO1	5. Responses to claims about socially responsible initiatives	Anuar & Mohamad, 2012; Anuar et al., 2013; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Obermiller et al., 2005; Romani et al., 2016; Webb & Mohr, 1998.
RQ1, RO1	6. Perceptions and evaluations of plastic packaging recycling initiative among brands and retailers	N/A.
RQ1, RO1	7. Perceptions and evaluations on motives behind socially responsible initiatives	Foreh & Grier, 2003, Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Rim & Kim, 2016; Yoon et al., 2006.
RO2	8. Effects of internet access knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives	Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Zhang & Hanks, 2017.
RQ1, 2, RO1, 2	9. Factors that contribute to awareness and knowledge of socially responsible initiatives and the credibility of the sources	Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001; Morel & Pruyn, 2003; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Zhang & Hanks, 2017.
RQ2, RO1, 2	10. Factors influencing trust towards socially responsible initiatives	Isaac & Grayson, 2017; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009a; Schmeltz, 2012; Vanhamme & Grobbe, 2009; Vlachos et al., 2009.

4.6.1.3 Video call platforms for online interviewing

To collect the data, the researcher offered traditional face-to-face interviews before the lockdown rules in March in the UK due to Covid-19 (Kuenssberg, 2020). The researcher also used Facetime, Instagram video call and WhatsApp video call functions to conduct some video call interviews based upon the participants' agreement. The researcher suggested different options, including Facetime, Instagram, WhatsApp, Zoom and Skype. In the end, the researcher went with the participants' preferred platforms. All interviews were recorded by a separate device with a secure password that is only accessible to the researcher.

The researcher used Facetime, which has replicated features to face-to-face interviews (Archibald et al., 2019). According to Johnson (2020a), in the UK, 84% of WhatsApp users are aged between 25 and 34, followed by 80% of users aged 18–24. These figures clearly show the popularity of the mobile application among younger age groups. Gen Z's age ranges from 10 to 25 as of 2020 (equal to birth year ranging from 1995 to 2010; Francis & Hoefel, 2018), which are the ages of some of WhatsApp's heaviest users. WhatsApp relies on an internet connection and allows text and voice messaging and face-to-face video calls (WhatsApp, 2020). WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption means that messages and calls are secured between the parties communicating with each other, but no one else, even WhatsApp (WhatsApp, 2020). The researcher used WhatsApp's video call function to conduct the interviews based on the participants' agreement. Another platform that was used to conduct the interview was Instagram. As of June 2020, there were 26.54 million Instagram users in the UK, in which the highest number of users (30.5%) was aged between 25–34, followed by 23.4% of people aged between 18–24 (Johnson, 2020b). Those heavy users fall into Gen Z's age group. In addition, recent research shows that 50% of Gen Z consumers consult their Instagram feed multiple times a day (Hennigan, 2019). Thus, it is expected that Gen Z members are reachable via Instagram. Instagram also has one-to-one and group video call capability (Hennessy, 2020; Leskin, 2020), making it feasible to conduct video call interviews.

4.6.1.4 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted before the main research study to pre-test the feasibility of the research study (Frey, 2018; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). A pilot study can help increase the likelihood of success by improving the interview schedules and interview questions (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The pilot study is referred to as a mini version of the main study and is essential for good study design (van Teijlingen &

Hundley, 2002). It is used to pre-test many research instruments such as questionnaires, interview schedules, procedures, data collection and sample recruitment techniques in preparation for the full-scale study (Hassan et al., 2006; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002).

All the interviews were conducted in English. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Both face-to-face and video call interviews were used to collect the data (Pantano & Priporas, 2016). The pilot study was carried out, and a modification of the interview guide was created.

4.6.1.4.1 Procedure

The pilot study was conducted with the same protocol as the main study. All the participants were given a ‘participant sheet’ to read and a consent form to sign before the interviews commenced. All participants were thanked for taking part in the research and were offered the chance to ask any questions. The researcher briefly explained the purpose of the research, the information on the ‘participant sheet’, and the participant’s right to withdraw from the research anytime. The participant sheet contained all contact details of the researcher and the supervisory team if the participants decided to withdraw from the research or had any other inquiries. It also reviewed data protection matters.

All participants were asked to fill out some screening questions regarding demographic profiles (age, gender, location, level of education) (**Appendix C**). The researcher asked for permission to voice record the conversations even though all participants were informed from the first point of communication. The participant sheet also indicated that all the interviews would be recorded for data analysis purposes. The researcher tried to establish a comfortable atmosphere and ask participants to consider the interview a chat about their personal opinions in terms of socially responsible practices among brands and retailers.

All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed by the researcher. All the recorded interviews were stored on electronic devices with a secure password accessible by the researcher. NVivo 11 was used to analyse the data. Each participant was assigned an ID code (P001, P002, ...) consistent with the recorded audio files. For validity purposes, all participants were sent their interview transcripts with comments of how their answers fit into themes, sub-themes and codes of the study. This process is referred to as the member-checking technique, where researchers ask participants to read and make comments on the accuracy of the data and interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000), which enhances validity (Grossoehme, 2014).

4.6.1.4.2 Reflections from the pilot study

Issues observed from the pilot study include:

- Difficulty scheduling the meetings. Participants were given the right to choose the date and the time that suited them. Hence it took a few attempts to find the best options for both sides.
- Difficulty finding a meeting location. It was somewhat challenging to find a place quiet enough to record the interviews.
- Difficulty in maintaining a smooth connection of the video call. As a result, the interviews took longer than expected.

The pilot interview proved beneficial in many ways. It helped test the feasibility of the interview guide to simplify all the questions and make sure the participants understood them. The pilot study proved that it is crucial to maintain consistency in the way words are used, such as brands, manufacturers and retailers, instead of businesses and companies. The pilot was valuable to the researcher in terms of data collection skills, for example, the ability to bring up appropriate prompts to obtain explanations and clarifications from the participants. It is crucial to take notes during the interviews so that follow-up questions can be formed. According to Tracy (2020), follow-up questions can be pre-planned, or parts of the participants' answers can be repeated to ask for further clarification. This technique allows the researcher to explore the topic at a deeper level. Some examples of spontaneous follow-up questions and pre-planned follow-up questions can be seen in one of the interview questions, Question 4 of the pilot study (see **Appendix D**).

4.6.1.5 Main study

All interviews were conducted in English. The data was collected, transcribed and analysed between January and June 2020. Both face-to-face and video call interviews were used to collect the data (Pantano & Priporas, 2016). On average, the interviews lasted 55 minutes.

4.6.1.5.1 Procedure

All participants were given a copy of the 'participant sheet' and the 'consent form' to sign before the interviews. The participant sheet contains all information regarding data protection matters, the participants' right to withdraw from the study, and the contact details of the researcher as well as the supervisory team. At the beginning of the interviews, they were briefed again about the background of the research. All participants

were then offered to ask any questions before the interviews commenced. All participants were thanked for taking part in the research. The participants were then asked to fill in a few screening questions in terms of demographic profiles.

The researcher tried to establish a comfortable atmosphere and asked participants not to consider the interviews as something serious but a very informal chat about their opinions and experiences about socially responsible practices. Different conversations were formed about the researcher's background, the participant's relationship to the person who introduced them to the researcher, university life, upcoming projects, interesting online courses and quarantine life. Elmir et al. (2011) indicate that building rapport and minimising power imbalance through small talk helps participants feel less anxious, more relaxed and more willing to talk about their experiences. The initial small talk and icebreaking questions at the beginning of the interviews helped the researcher get to know the participants, build trust, rapport and create a more natural conversation (Brennen, 2013). Rapport building is considered necessary in persuading participants to disclose the information the researcher seeks (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012) and is characterised by respect, interest, attention and good manners from the interviewer's end (Seidman, 2006).

Though the participants were informed at the first point of introduction about the voice recording and the participant sheet listed information about interview recording, the researcher still asked each participant again for permission to voice record the interview for data analysis purposes before starting the interviews. The researcher then informed participants of the number of questions and reassured participants that there was no right or wrong answer.

The researcher asked all participants the same central questions from the interview guide. Prompts and follow-up questions were used based on the situations. The researcher remained silent to listen, take notes and ask for clarifications, if relevant. Body language and eye contact were used while talking to participants. The researcher offered each participant a chance to ask any question at the end of the interview and thanked participants for their time and support in the data collection of the study.

All the interviews were transcribed and imported to NVivo 12 software for data analysis. Each participant and their interview transcript were assigned a unique ID code (M001, M002,...M035) for anonymity and confidentiality. For validation purposes, the researcher also used the member-checking technique (explained above). During the

interview, follow-up questions and prompts were used along with the main interview guide.

4.6.2 Ethical issues

‘Research ethics are concerned with moral behaviours in research contexts’ (Wiles, 2013, p. 4). It is crucial to obtain research ethics approval before conducting research, even in the case of low-risk research (Newson & Lipworth, 2015). The researcher obtained an ethics approval letter from Middlesex University before conducting the research, in this case, before the participant recruitment stage.

Right to withdraw

All research participants had the right to withdraw from the study anytime during the interviews and for a specific time after the interviews were completed (Seidman, 2006). All participants must have an equal right to withdraw from a study without penalty, and this was clearly stated on the consent form (see **Appendix E**).

Informed consent

Obtaining informed consent from participants is considered central to research ethics (Kelly, 2010). Informed consent should provide potential participants with accurate, complete and open information (Brenen, 2013) about the research and may influence the participants’ decision to partake (Fisher & Anushko, 2008). A consent form with a general statement, usually written, provides a simple explanation of the aspects of research to participants. Based on this document, participants have a complete understanding of the potential risks (Babbie, 2016; Neuman, 2014). Please see **Appendix E** for the consent form used.

All participants were given the consent form to read and sign before the interviews (in person or via email). All participants gave their informed consent in written form (via physical consent form and email) and verbal form, with the latter being recorded.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality is concerned with ‘the right to control information about oneself’, and all means of identification should be removed if the results will be published in any form (Kent, 2000, p. 65). Tracy (2020) lists several concerns regarding confidentiality, including maintaining the confidentiality of participants’ responses, potential consequences associated with participation and steps to safeguard people’s participation. In the current study, along with a unique ID code for each participant to ensure anonymity,

data collected was kept on secured devices with a password that was only accessible to the researcher.

Risks and benefits

Risk concerns the safety and well-being of the participants (Wiles, 2013). It is also important to consider the benefits for participants (Yin, 2011). Walliman (2006) suggests that ethical research aims to cause no harm and, if possible, create some gain for the participants of the research project. There is no life and death risk or harm associated with the current study since the participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of socially responsible practices based on their personal experiences. Regarding benefits, the researcher hopes to understand the research topic of interest and contribute to the research field by changing the ways brands and retailers behave in terms of plastic packaging, which in turn benefits the environment and individuals.

Storing and transmitting data and data protection:

Data management comprises the ways personal data is collected, stored and handled to maintain confidentiality (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). In this case, personal data was collected, handled and stored securely under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). According to Walliman (2011, p. 49), the Data Protection Act of 1998 in the UK and equivalent regulations elsewhere indicate ‘the rights of the subjects and responsibilities of the compilers and holders of the data’ collected. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the researcher, and all electronic data will be stored on password-protected devices (recording devices and computer), which are also only accessible to the researcher.

4.6.3 Validity and reliability

Like any other research, it is vital to demonstrate the rigour (Morse, 2015) and trustworthiness (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) of qualitative research. Thick, rich description is one of the strategies for establishing credibility in qualitative research (Morse, 2015). Thick description is associated with the constructivism/interpretivism paradigm, which involves detailed and rich descriptions of the setting, the participants and the themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The setting is described in detail in the procedure section of the pilot study (4.6.1.4.1) and the main study (4.6.1.5.1). The demographic profiles of all participants are included in the main study’s respondent profiles section (Table 4.5). Detailed themes can be seen in Table 4.7 and Table 4.8.

It is recommended that incorporating and maintaining the validity and reliability of qualitative research should be the responsibility of researchers instead of external reviewers (Bashir et al., 2008). The researcher can achieve validity and reliability through a consistent and well-documented process of data collection and analysis (Bolderston, 2012; Morse, 2015). Data collection is documented in detail in the ‘Data collection’ section above (4.7.1.3.1 and 4.7.1.4.1), and the process of data analysis is described in the section ‘Data analysis’ (Figure 4.3).

Reliability can also be achieved using a common interview guide (Moustakas, 1994), which the researcher used to conduct all the interviews. Furthermore, Priporas et al. (2020a) indicate that the findings’ reliability can be ensured when all interviews are conducted in the same setting by the same researcher. In this project, the researcher is the only person who conducted the interviews, reducing the chance of changing the interview guide and enhancing the findings’ reliability.

Prompts and follow-up questions are not standardised because it is erroneous to assume that all participants will give the same responses. As a result, spontaneous follow-up questions were used to clarify the initial responses of the participants, whereas planned follow-up questions were used to make interview questions more specific and help navigate the participants towards the main concerns of the research (Bolderston, 2012).

4.6.4 Data analysis

4.6.4.1 NVivo

NVivo was used for organising and managing all empirical data in the current study. NVivo 12 Plus software was used for data analysis for many reasons. NVivo, as computer software for data analysis, does not analyse the data but facilitates data management and handling (Burnard et al., 2008). Nodes in NVivo are compatible with grounded theory and thematic analysis (which the current research applied) and make it easier to create codes and discover themes (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo allows analysing open-ended responses from a survey or interviews and reflective writing, images and videos (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019).

Robins and Eisen (2017) indicate that the use of NVivo software plays a vital role in achieving successful completion of a project that requires large scale data to be analysed within a specific timeframe, as coding a set of documents or nodes can be done by drag and drop (Richards, 1999). Within NVivo software, ‘searching merging, splitting, and combining codes as well as coding new text segments and removing coding of irrelevant

passages are simple and quick' (O'Kane et al., 2019, pp. 25–26). Since NVivo allows data to be reviewed, retrieved, searched, sorted, and tracked, it was possible to constantly compare the new codes that emerged with the previous codes (Smyth, 2006; Woods et al., 2016).

Some advantages of NVivo have been highlighted by Wik et al. (2019), including:

- Nodes (codes) are identified by the researchers; therefore, key themes and concepts of interest are identified.
- Congruity between the identified nodes (codes) and the data coded into those nodes.
- Assigned meanings are the result of human intellect and judgement, not a computer.

Based on the discussions above, NVivo was chosen based on its suitability and advantages.

4.6.4.2 Thematic analysis

Examples of qualitative data analysis are thematic analysis, content analysis, comparative analysis and discourse analysis (Dawson, 2009). This study uses thematic analysis (TA), and the reasons for choosing TA are discussed below.

First, the primary objective of data collection was to represent the subjective viewpoints of Gen Z regarding brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. TA is useful for examining different participants' perspectives and 'highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights' (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2).

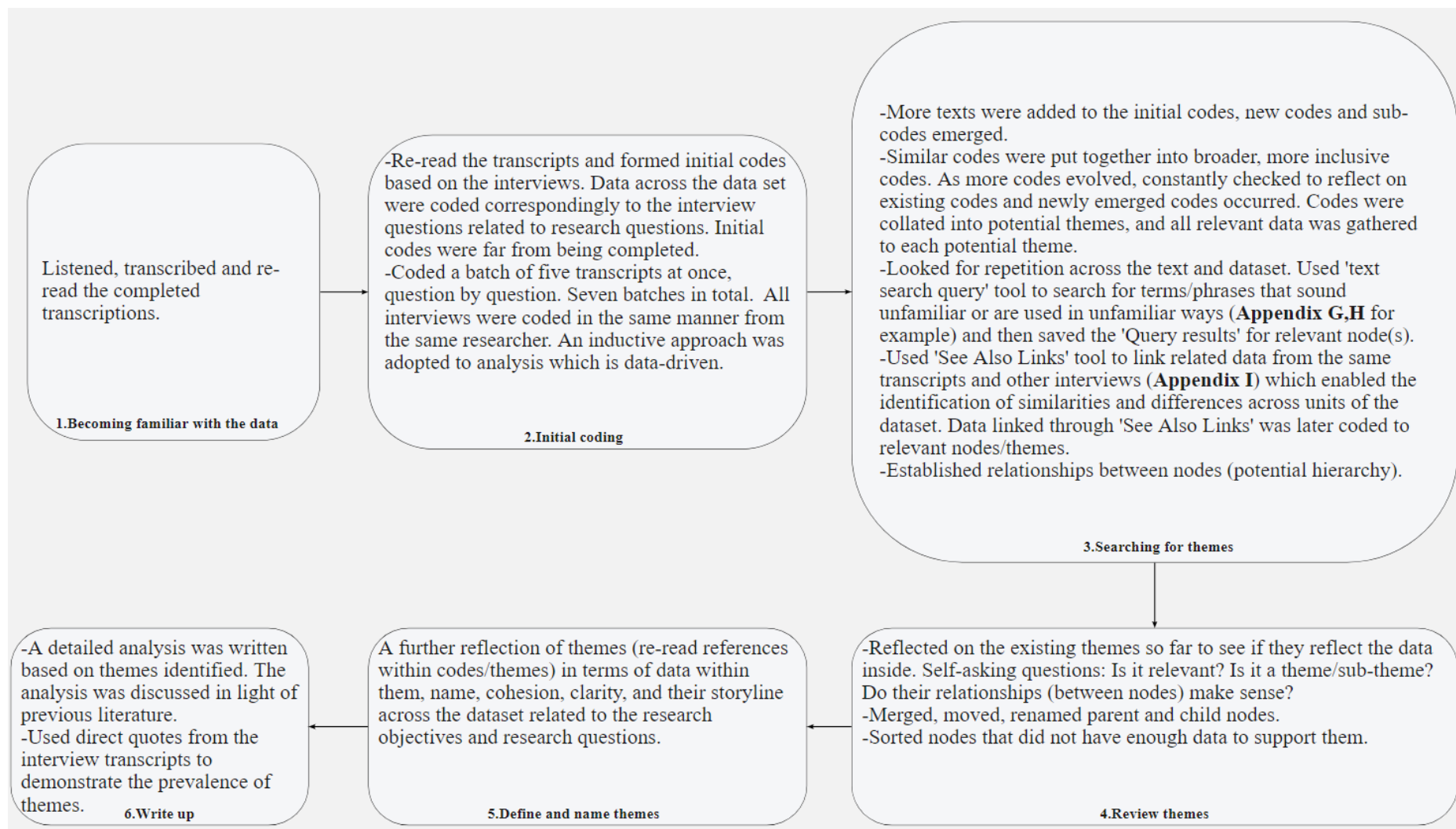
Thematic analysis can be used within both realist and constructionist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) state that 'thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis'. The current study adopts a qualitative method, and TA was employed for analysing the qualitative data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Maguire and Delahunt (2017) explain that the goal of TA is to identify patterns within the data and use them to address the research. Thus, the TA method is an excellent way of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within a set of data with rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allows data to be analysed in depth (Grogan et al., 2018). Thus, in TA, manifest (surface meanings of the data) and latent contents (deeper/underlying meanings of the data) should be considered (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

TA is highly inductive, meaning ‘the themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researcher’ (Dawson, 2009, p. 119). This process was suitable for the nature of the research study. In this sense, the current research adopts inductive thematic analysis meaning it does not force the data to fit into ‘pre-existing coding frame or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions’ and ‘themes are identified strongly linked to the data themselves’ (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 8). Moreover, the inductive approach is suitable when prior knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation is limited or fragmented (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, as cited in Cho & Lee, 2014; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Qualitative research with an interview approach often results in a wealth of rich data, which is why a rigorous and systematic procedure is needed to effectively manage and analyse qualitative data (Stroh, 2000). A step-by-step analysis is shown in **Figure 4.3** below. Elliott (2018) suggests two ways of ensuring reliability in qualitative coding: consistency between coders and consistency over time with the same coder. The current study has only one coder who followed the same coding procedure (**Figure 4.3**).

Figure 4.3: Six-step thematic analysis.



Sources: Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bradley et al., 2007; Castleberry and Nolen, 2018; Clarke and Braun, 2013; Clarke et al., 2015; Haeyen et al., 2017; Howitt and Cramer, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017; Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Terry et al., 2017; Vaismoradi et al., 2013.

King(2004) suggests that searching for themes starts with a few predefined codes to help with the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2019) explain that the pre-determined codebook or coding frame is used as a process to identify relevant materials for each theme correctly. In coding reliability TA, the analysis starts with developing themes that “are often developed from data collection questions or following data familiarisation” Braun and Clarke (2019, p.12) (**Table 4.7**). Although the initial codes and themes were used in this project, the researcher was flexible and allowed codes to emerge from the data. Hence, some codes emerged that were irrelevant to the research questions. As a result, they were not brought into the final themes, sub-themes and codes (see **Appendix J** for emerged codes that were inductively derived from the interviews).

Table 4.7: Initial codes generated from the interviews.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions on socially responsible initiatives and plastic packaging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived motives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of communication source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The credibility of information about brands and retailers social responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors influencing trust towards brands or retailers’ socially responsible initiatives

Table 4.8: Final themes, sub-themes and codes.

Perceptions and evaluations of socially responsible initiatives and motives
• Perceptions on socially responsible initiatives and plastic packaging
• Perceived motives
- Profit-based interest
- Others' welfare
Factors contributing to the knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives and information credibility
• Type of communication source
- Brand/retailer-controlled
- Non-brand/retailer-controlled
• Social media
• Internet access
- Advantages
- Disadvantages
• The credibility of information about brands and retailers social responsibility
- Source trustworthiness
➤ Biased
➤ Reliable
- Content
➤ How the information is communicated
➤ Who promotes, produces or discusses the content
➤ The fit between the spokespersons and the content
- Disbelief or distrust in the credibility of information
Factors influencing trust towards brands or retailers' socially responsible initiatives
• Evidence
- Impacts of socially responsible initiatives
• Multiple cues
• Reputation
• Information type and credibility
• How brands and retailers present themselves
- Reasons for being socially responsible
- The fit between the nature of the brands or retailers and socially responsible initiatives
- The management teams
• Transparency
• Size and scale
• History of socially responsible behaviour
• Quantity of socially responsible initiatives
• Charitable donations
• Matching personal values
• Pricing

4.7. Summary

The chapter began with a discussion of the research philosophy and explained the adoption of the interpretivist paradigm. It then discussed the different research methods and justified why the qualitative approach was most suitable for this study. Next, the research approaches were discussed, and the inductive approach was chosen with justification.

The chapter then moved to the sampling strategies section, explaining the use of snowball and purposive sampling techniques in the current study. The sample size for the pilot study and the main study was also detailed in this section. The chapter continued with the data collection section, where semi-structured interviews were described as the most suitable data gathering technique for this study. The chapter explained the use of different video call platforms in collecting data along with face-to-face interviews.

Next, a detailed discussion of the pilot study procedure and a reflection on the importance of the pilot study was provided. A detailed discussion of the main study procedure was also included. The chapter continued with further discussions of ethical issues, validity and reliability in conducting research. Finally, the chapter reviewed the NVivo software and thematic analysis used for the data analysis of the current research.

CHAPTER 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the research methodology and methods used to collect and analyse data. This chapter presents the findings and interpretation of the data collected. In particular, the findings are categorised into four main themes based on the thematic analysis technique applied in this research study. The researcher also interprets and analyses the findings by integrating them into the existing literature.

5.2 Findings and interpretation of the results

Theme one reveals Gen Z's perceptions and evaluations regarding the motives behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, which helps answer RQ1 (How does Gen Z perceive brands and retailers' socially responsible practices) and RO1 (Is Gen Z sceptical of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives). Theme two deals with factors that contribute to Gen Z's knowledge and awareness, which helps answer RQ1. Theme two also uncovers Gen Z' perceptions and evaluations of the credibility of the information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, which answers RQ1 and RO1 as well as partly answering RQ2 (What are the factors that can potentially influence CSR scepticism among Generation Z) and RO2 (Identify factors that influence the development of CSR scepticism among Generation Z in the UK). Finally, theme three contains an analysis of factors influencing trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible practices among Gen Z, which helps answer RQ2 and RO1, RO2.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Perceptions and evaluations of socially responsible initiatives and motives

The participants' perceptions and evaluations of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and motivation(s) behind them, specifically a plastic packaging initiative, are presented under this theme.

5.2.1.1 Perceptions of socially responsible initiatives and plastic packaging

Participants acknowledged changes regarding socially responsible initiatives and plastic packaging among brands and retailers in the UK. Specifically, changes and efforts have been made but not enough, and they vary between sectors and industries. The following quotes reflect this insight:

'I think they are doing a little bit but not enough. So I feel like there have been improvements in terms of packaging, emissions. There has been a lot of media hype about stuff like 'oh, they are doing this and that' but really overall, they could do a lot more and [it] would make life much simpler'. (#M007)

'Many supermarkets charge people for plastic bags to encourage people to bring their own bags, reduce plastic use and it obviously helps the environment. Food retailers are taking a better approach than fashion retailers, who still use a lot of plastic packaging when they don't need to. They do not use organic materials that can be recycled. Companies like that obviously have not taken into consideration the environmental aspect'. (#M016)

'It depends on the sectors. If you look at the grocery sector, they are behaving responsible like they use reusable bags, ... Fairtrade logo. A lot of their products say where they are from. Their supply chain does not have palm oil or child labour involved. But then again, if you look at Amazon, their packaging has so much plastic and paper. With smaller items, I feel like they could cut back. It depends on the sector and the company involved. Some sectors are actually working towards it and showing consumers that they are trying to be responsible, but other sectors do not care'. (#M018)

Both positive and negative views on brands and retailers were expressed. Two participants had only negative perceptions of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Their views can be seen as follows:

'To be honest, they are only doing it for marketing purposes. They do not care ... Primark, they are switching to those recyclable bags. I don't know if it costs them less than the plastic bags. I think it costs them more to switch, so it is just marketing. They don't care about the environment'. (#M008)

'Brands are very marketable in terms of being socially responsible ... I do not think they are behaving very well. I do not think they set a good example, to be honest with you. They have big responsibilities, and they are not very organised. That is how I feel about the UK ... I do not think they are responsible...'. (#M010)

Overall, there are more negative perceptions and viewpoints expressed than positive ones. The stronger presence of negative perceptions and viewpoints corresponds to the dominance of negative motive attributions among participants who associated brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives with their profit-based interests.

5.2.1.2 Perceived motives

Participants were asked if they ever considered any reasons for brands and retailers to behave socially responsibly in general and in terms of plastic packaging. The result was divided into profit-based interest and others' welfare. Gen Z individuals perceive and

evaluate brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and motives differently, which can be reflected through the motives attributed.

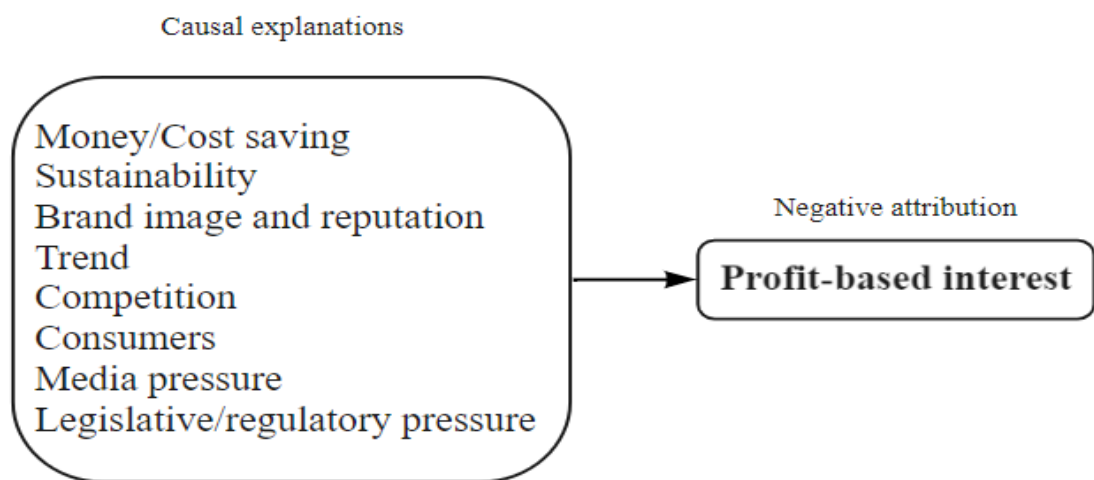
Table 5.1: Detailed motives attributed among 35 Gen Z respondents.

Profit-based interest only (n=20)	Others' welfare only (n=0)	Both (n=15)
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5.2.1.2.1 Profit-based interest

Different causal explanations for motivations behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives can be seen in **Figure 5.1** below.

Figure 5.1: Causal explanations associated with profit-based interest.



A standard view among participants is that brands and retailers see being socially responsible and environmentally friendly as a 'trend' that may benefit them. In addition, by doing what competitors are doing, brands and retailers can keep up with the 'competition', attract more 'consumers', which subsequently means higher sales and greater profits. Avoiding bad publicity or aiming for good publicity can also be the reason for brands and retailers to behave socially responsible according to participants. 'Law' or 'regulation' is regarded as another causal explanation for socially responsible behaviours among brands and retailers. These views can be reflected as follows:

<i>'I think a lot of it is marketing. It just fits in because they have to ... You have on the one hand the concern of excessive plastic use, especially in the general public, and the companies will just follow the trends in order to continue to grow and to not lose their customers, they will make efforts'. (#Moo6)</i>	Trend
<i>'...It would not be too hard to switch to a more eco-friendly brand, and there is a lot more of them now, so the older companies who</i>	Competition

<i>have used plastic for a long time have to keep up their competition....’ (#M021)</i>	
<i>‘...the only reason they change anything – it is because they think they can get more consumers in because of it.... They said, ‘oh look, we are reducing our plastic because it is good for the environment, hoping they get more people to come in because of that reason ... They are changing because they might miss some of the markets. They are just doing the bare minimum to tap into that part of the market and then still keep the general market’. (#M022)</i>	Consumers
<i>‘I think social media. Things blow up so quickly, especially on Twitter. Some persons think that a company is using too much plastic; they can just post it up, and then that is it. So, they know they have to make an effort; otherwise, they will be in the press, people will tweet about them, posting things on Facebook about them’. (#M014)</i>	Media pressure
<i>‘Perhaps in a few years, I do not know when but maybe when the law is stricter. It would probably be profitable to start now rather than having to change everything, like start a whole new line of production in 2030. So might as well change now for the legal requirement’. (#M024)</i>	Legislative/ regulatory pressure

For additional direct quotes for each category, please see **Appendix K**.

Additionally, Gen Z participants also said that brands and retailers are socially responsible because of the cost-saving or money-saving and sustainability purposes which ultimately benefit brands and retailers. Brand ‘*image*’ and brand ‘*reputation*’ causes were also recorded. The following quotes reflect these views:

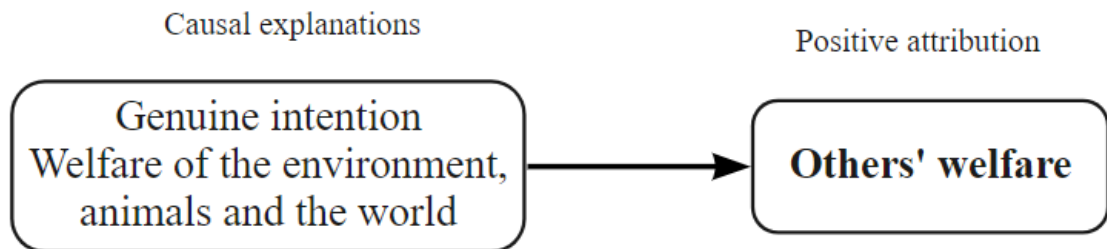
<i>‘It could be potentially because it reduces the costs for them. The idea of refillable could save them money on packaging material. In a way, it is good for them’. (#M002)</i>	Cost/money-saving
<i>‘...They know it is not sustainable in the future. Their future is like 100 years, not 20 years, so they don’t feel like they do it quickly enough. They understand that. They may prepare for the future where things change quicker; then, they have to change quicker. So I think they are preparing for that’. (#M007)</i>	Sustainability
<i>‘...if they have a very bad reputation and come out with something socially responsible, I would initially assume that they are doing it to improve their reputation...’ (#M021)</i> <i>‘...it was definitely for the public image like we are sustainable we are doing what you want... I guess their brand image ... some brands are doing it for the look and the image...’ (#M033)</i>	Brand image and reputation

For additional direct quotes for each category, please see **Appendix L**.

5.2.1.2.2 Others' welfare

As opposed to causes associated with profit-based interest, causes associated with others' welfare are also present. **Figure 5.2** below illustrates the different causal explanations associated with the others' benefits used by respondents.

Figure 5.2: Causal explanations associated with the others' welfare attribution.



The attribution of others' welfare is associated with causes such as concerns about the welfare of the environment, animals and the planet. These participants think that certain brands and retailers simply care or are conscious of their operational impacts; hence they behave in a socially responsible way. These views can be reflected as follows:

'...Reason being the environment ... endangerment of some animals' extinction and stuff like that I think it plays a part for them...' (#M003)

'...it obviously costs them to make all the changes, so it is not like they do it for a quick win. They are trying to do it for the longer term ... help the planet...' (#M005)

'...And then 20% of the time they do actually want to be socially responsible, and they do care about their impacts on the environment...' (#M029)

According to Gen Z participants, brands and retailers implement change because managers are conscious and care about the impact of the business on the environment. The initiatives are driven by company leadership, who genuinely care about the plastic issue or the environment, categorised as genuine intention. This view can be seen as follows:

'... I mean, this is not common, but obviously, the management team might be socially conscious, so they would change.' (#M021)

There are many causal explanations for the implementation of CSR initiatives, according to the participants interviewed. The word cloud shows that Gen Z talked about the change of plastic packaging. Few words were mentioned commonly among Gen Z interviewees when discussing their perceptions and evaluations of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. For example, *customers, consumers, public, image, money, sustainable, environment, media, government, law, trend, sales, world*, to name just a few. These words combine explanations associated with profit-based interest and others' welfare.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Factors contributing to the knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives and information credibility

The participants were asked about the factors contributing to their knowledge and awareness of brands and retailers' socially responsible practices to determine how those factors influence scepticism towards the matter. This theme provides an understanding of communication channels where Gen Z individuals learn about socially responsible initiatives. Subsequently, their judgement on the credibility of the communication channels can be beneficial in terms of understanding their scepticism towards the matter under discussion.

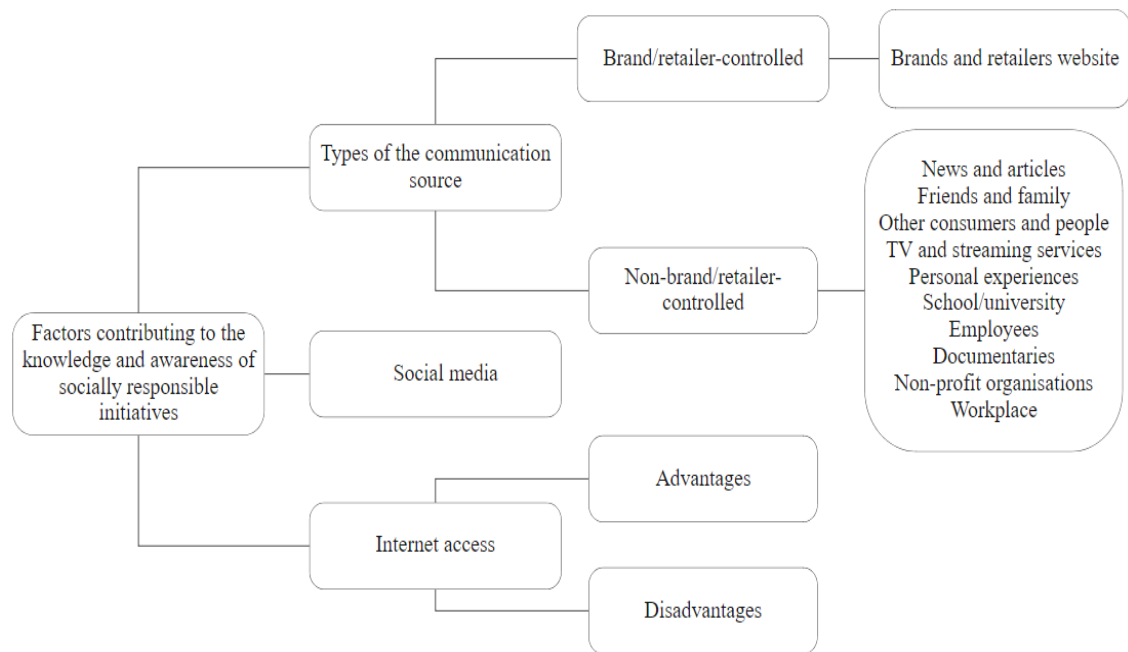
5.2.2.1 Type of communication source

The questions focus on the communication channels where Gen Z individuals obtain information or learn about brands and retailers' socially responsible practices. Many of the sources mentioned are accessible via the internet, including brand/retailer-controlled and non-brand/retailer-controlled sources.

Table 5.2: Percentage of data on the type of communication source that contributes to Gen Z awareness and knowledge of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives

Brand/retailer-controlled sources (n=20)	57%
Non-brand/retailer-controlled sources (n=35)	100%
Social media (n=31)	88%
Internet access (n=35)	100%

Figure 5.4: Factors that contribute to knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives as codes.



5.2.2.1.1 Brand/retailer-controlled sources

Regarding information about socially responsible behaviours, a brand or retailer’s website was is of the most common platforms mentioned by participants. The following direct quotes illustrate this finding:

<i>‘...their website. I go to their actual website and browse on their website to see what they are doing...’ (#M012)</i>
<i>‘...Go direct to their websites. They have a page of social responsibility. I think, just read through that’. (#M014)</i>
<i>‘...So I normally go to the website whether they are using plastic, whether they are using animal-friendly products...’ (#M030)</i>

Some mentioned other types of direct communication from brands and retailers such as email, newsletters, posters, billboards, leaflets, advertising or information on the actual packaging or product. Since the website is accessible via the internet, it can be said that Gen Z members rely heavily on the internet when it comes to information about socially responsible initiatives.

5.2.2.1.2 Non-brand/retailer-controlled sources

Gen Z individuals consulted in this study also learn about brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives from different non-brand/retailer-controlled platforms, which can

be seen from the following direct quotes (for additional direct quotes, please see **Appendix M**):

<p><i>‘...I guess on news articles they say, ‘oh this company is now doing this or someone more likely to say to you, and you learn about their social responsibilities. Otherwise, you don’t really hear about it...’ (#M005).</i></p>	<p>News and articles (n=30 or 86%)</p>
<p><i>‘I think friends and family play a big part. If someone knows this company is evil, like Nestle. Nestle is hard to look up because they own so many smaller brands, so to be able to get to them is really difficult. I know of them, I know of the water stealing that they do ... that is through research and friends and family.’ (#M007)</i></p>	<p>Friends and family (n=21 or 60%)</p>
<p><i>‘...it would be what other people have seen or have experienced and talk about it ... Someone’s blog or people [who] have first-hand experience with the brands, and they tell me about it ... I think most trusted probably word of mouth...’ (#M006)</i></p>	<p>Other consumers/ People (n=15 or 43%)</p>
<p><i>‘...I think also news and television figures, so like Greta Thunberg. I read about her. Definitely news and television ... Netflix or Now TV...’ (#M033)</i></p>	<p>TV and streaming services (n=11 or 31%)</p>
<p><i>‘Can I say life experience, like I actually walk around and see the logo and I go home I google the logo and I read what the company is actually doing’. (#M018)</i></p>	<p>Personal experiences (n=7 or 20%)</p>
<p><i>‘...We also learn about stuff at school. So I guess a lot of it comes from school as well ... school tells you how to look for information like ‘don’t use this, don’t use that’ ... but I also think a lot of it has to do with the school... Because we have like a green committee. And we will have an assembly every month about what the school was doing to gain a green flag award, which my school is particularly keen on ... I feel like for the last two years I have a lot of information thrown at me about it from my current school especially. So I have become more aware because of that’. (#M022)</i></p>	<p>School/ University (n=7 or 20%)</p>
<p><i>‘I am able to watch documentaries and stuff and be like, ‘oh this is actually having a big impact maybe I should do less of it’ ... B corps app and website and documentaries, and I guess just general knowledge by now ... You have David Attenborough’s documentaries...’ (#M027)</i></p>	<p>Documentaries (n=6 or 17%)</p>
<p><i>‘...If it a friend – for example, I have a friend who works in this plastic making company. I will trust this person more because they use the machine, they have been part of the process, so I trust them more. I think it is down to how well do I know the</i></p>	<p>Employees (n=6 or 17%)</p>

<i>person and close the experience that they had. ...people who work there, people like staff...’ (#M006)</i>	
<i>‘... NGO is a good place to go. Don’t know why I didn’t mention it before. They will make reports like that ... They stand up for what they believe in and other underlying agenda. They would have written reports...’ (#M020)</i>	NGOs (n=3 or 8%)
<i>‘I guess the people around me – my colleagues at work. My company is big on being socially responsible. We have environmental committees, so in each agency, there is one person, and that person is someone you go to when you have questions about recycling. And the committee, they would have a meeting once a month where they talk about what they can do to improve this and that or what they can do to be more socially responsible. So yeah, that does play a big part in learning about that stuff... The committee at work gives sessions about how you make the change or go to this website about recycling and learn about it’. (#M002)</i>	Workplace (n=2 or 6%)

Through friends and family, information on the regarded topic could come in the form of both online and offline communications. It is interesting to note that these Gen Z individuals learn and obtain information about socially responsible practices through news and articles as well as friends and family more than by consulting brands and retailers.

Overall, Gen Z individuals in this study rely more on non-brand/retailer-controlled sources of information regarding brands and retailers’ socially responsible practices. There is a mixture of online and offline information sources they use to obtain and learn about the regarded matter. It is essential to note that Gen Z individuals mentioned many sources that are accessible via the internet.

5.2.2.1.3 Social media

Social media networks (accessible via the internet) are the most significant factor contributing to awareness and knowledge of socially responsible initiatives among Gen Z individuals in this study. The following comments indicate this insight:

<i>‘Most sustainable brands they would have like a little section on their website with like reasons and also a lot a brands I follow on Instagram, they have a little highlight that summarises their sustainability ... The app ‘good on you’... A lot of people are educating about this topic from YouTube videos, Instagram video’ (#M031)</i>
<i>‘Main factor is social media. That is where I mostly see things. I get things shared with me. That is where I receive information. I think that what really affects people.</i>

Social media is the big one ... I think for the general public, the way for the information to get across is social media. That is the most effective way to communicate ... Twitter and Instagram. It is easier to share big news and stuff on Twitter. Say you get a picture of a landfill site, a picture of ice cap melting. It is much easier to re-tweet it and send it out to everyone. So I think Twitter is the main one'. (#M032)

'Sometimes I use Twitter. I know it can be unreliable at times. But if they have an article to back it up or a website that links things together, then I would look at the article first before I make a judgement on what to believe – what was said on that tweet ... They share links on Twitter if they see stuff and they feel it is reliable. Or, they share stuff on Instagram, like a celebrity's post or a link or whatever – they (friends) would just DM (direct message) it to me. But most of the time it is just between those two. If they do get it from a source from the internet or a website, they can just send it to me'. (#M034)

5.2.2.1.4 Internet access

The researcher further explored the role of internet access in terms of its effects on Gen Z awareness and knowledge of socially responsible activities. The analysis shows that the internet brings many advantages, which all participants acknowledged. In particular, internet access allows individuals to access information from different viewpoints, channels or platforms or sources. Many stated that the internet has helped broaden their awareness and knowledge of socially responsible practices. With internet access, participants can search and cross-check information at their convenience. However, the biggest downside of internet access is the information that can be posted and manipulated by anyone (see also section **5.2.3.1.1. Biased**).

Table 5.3: Percentage of data on acknowledging advantages and disadvantages of internet access as a factor that contributes to awareness and knowledge of socially responsible initiatives.

Acknowledgement of advantages	Acknowledgement of disadvantages
n=35	n=14

5.2.2.1.4.1 Advantages

The participants interviewed were aware of the upsides and downsides of internet access. Internet access demonstrated a significant impact on Gen Z individuals' access to information. The following quotes demonstrate the acknowledgement of the advantages of internet access regarding access to information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives:

'...It makes it easier and more accessible. I can just go on my phone and google if this product is ethically sourced before even buying it. A lot of information is available. And that helps a lot [when trying] to determine if the business is sustainable or not ... It increases my awareness and, like, you are more knowledgeable of a lot of things you were not knowledgeable about before thanks to the internet. It always keeps you updated. Knowledge is just at your fingertips. You can always be constantly updated, like, what is happening...' (#M018)

'...It makes it so much easier, especially with social media, because people are so outspoken about it. People are able to voice their opinions. So not only is it a great way to show brands that many people want more sustainable brands. It is easier to search, find and buy from sustainable brands. The internet allows you to search smaller brands, allows you to find them ... It is also easier to find people saying things like 'they are lying, they don't do this'. I guess it is easy to see how not only socially responsible brands are but why exactly they are socially responsible ... just take 5–10 mins to go scroll, and someone would have posts or Instagram stories that educate you...' (#M031)

5.2.2.1.4.2 Disadvantages

The benefits of internet access regarding the access of information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives were acknowledged. However, concerns regarding the reliability of the information about the topic were also expressed. The following quotes demonstrate this view:

#M007: 'with the internet, you can see that sort of information, but it can always be sponged in a different way'.

#M013: 'with the internet, anyone can post anything. That means any sort of information can go around'.

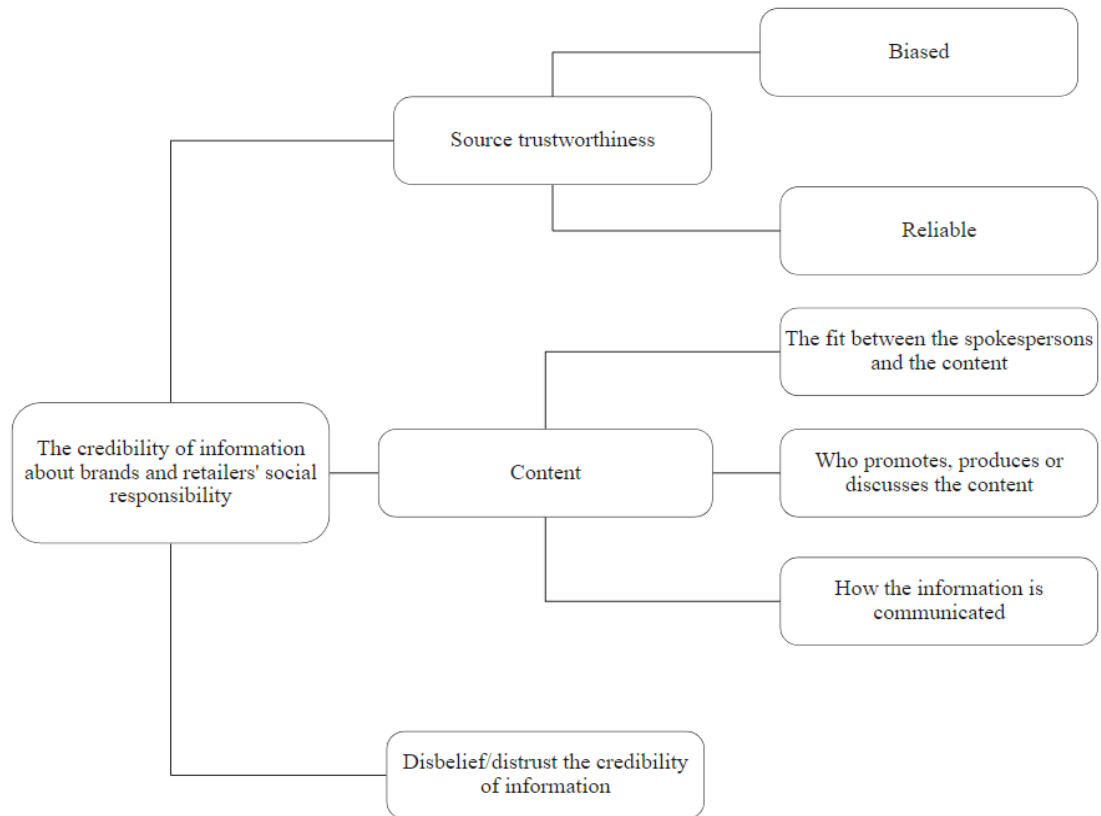
In sum, Gen Z individuals learnt and obtained information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives through various communication sources, including those that are both brand/retailer-controlled and non-brand/retailer-controlled, many are accessible via the internet. More non-brand/retailer-controlled sources were used than brand/retailer-controlled.

5.2.2.2 The credibility of information about brands and retailers' social responsibility

After discovering factors and information sources that contribute to Gen Z individuals' awareness and knowledge of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, the research further investigated whether Gen Z individuals believe and trust the information they learn and obtain from various sources. Participants interviewed were asked to explain what makes them trust/believe and distrust/disbelieve the information about brands and

retailers social responsibility. The sub-theme ‘The credibility of information about brands and retailers being socially responsible’ was developed, which contained three categories: ‘Source trustworthiness’, ‘Content’ and ‘Disbelief/distrust the credibility of information’(Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5: The credibility of information about brands and retailers’ social responsibility



5.2.2.2.1 Source trustworthiness

Participants explained their viewpoints regarding the trustworthiness of the sources where they learn about brands and retailers’ socially responsible activities. There is a mixture of perceptions and evaluations of a source’s trustworthiness. As a result, two categories called ‘biased’ and ‘reliable’ were created to separate different opinions on source trustworthiness (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Summary of perceptions on source trustworthiness according to participants interviewed.

Biased (n=25)	Reliable (n=25)
Social media News outlets Brands and retailers’ websites	News outlets Personal experiences Reliable and secured websites, including brands and retailers’ websites

5.2.2.2.1.1 Biased

Participants interviewed classified three information sources as ‘biased’: social media, certain news outlets and brands and retailers, including their websites. The perceptions on biased sources can be seen in the following quotes:

<p><i>‘...Probably social media like Facebook, Instagram – you get a lot of information through there, and I always take it with a pinch of salt. I am not sure how much of that is genuine. How much of it is coming from sources that cannot be verified...’ (#M009)</i></p> <p><i>‘Sometimes stuff on Facebook, when there is a link, and you click on it, it is not like a newspaper or anything. It is just an article created by a random person. Some people look at it and actually believe it. Something like that is very popular on Facebook these days. People made up information, something they have been told by friends or something...’ (#M016)</i></p> <p><i>‘I never use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. I feel like information gets manipulated so easily. And when people make comments on social media, it is so biased ... Twitter. Very very biased. Someone can just read a piece of information on the internet, and they will put it in their own words in a way that [is] either manipulated to be worse or manipulated to be better than it is’. (#M024)</i></p>	<p>Social media (n=20)</p>
<p><i>‘...Internet, news sources and stuff, but then there are always some levels of doubt’. (#M018)</i></p> <p><i>‘...If I do not have the internet, the only thing I have left is the TV with the news on it, and I do not think I trust it 100% ... I do not always trust the news – I feel like media outlets, they always gear towards certain views; they have their agenda, something they support, always ... I feel like there is some underlying agenda. You can see their views. Even with BBC and Sky, they have something they support. I would not go there. If I want to check if they are socially responsible, I go to a group like a union that monitors how companies are performing and rate how ethical they are, stuff like that’. (#M020)</i></p> <p><i>‘...News outlets. Even The Daily Mail at times would post an article or picture of working conditions in Sri Lanka, for example. I saw it a few months ago. So even things like that, I do not trust it. Take it with a pinch of salt’. (#M024)</i></p>	<p>News/news articles (n=11)</p>
<p><i>‘...I would not go on companies’ websites themselves because I feel like it is going to be biased whatever social issue is...’ (#M003).</i></p> <p><i>‘...even then, from websites themselves, I would be like ‘er, are you stretching the truth a little bit in places?’ There is always going to be that...’ (#M005)</i></p> <p><i>‘... I think the brands themselves, when they use buzzwords like ‘ethically sourced’, and they have a little star on top of it or in the</i></p>	<p>Brands and retailers’ websites (n=9)</p>

<p><i>small print it says this 'from this country'. You know it is a biased point of view ... Every company has the view of themselves to be the best they can ever be. No company is going to be self-critical of itself. I do not know, or maybe this is something we need in the future, like standards where you know the sources and that it can be trusted, but it is hard to do it on a global scale as well. Is that information reliable? I do not think so. Yeah, because they have a biased view of themselves...' (#Moo7)</i></p>	
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Social media is an unreliable and biased source of information. Interestingly, social media is one of the most significant contributors to Gen Z individuals' awareness and knowledge of socially responsible practices (see 5.2.2.1.3). Similarly, Gen Z members mentioned that they rely on brands and retailers, including their websites, for information on socially responsible behaviours (see 5.2.2.1.1). However, when it comes to trust, some Gen Z individuals interviewed think the information that comes from brands and retailers is biased because they have agendas and images they want to represent.

In terms of newspapers, different news outlets were mentioned as a biased source of information or one that could not be trusted completely by participants. Information from news outlets can be referred to as a non-brand/retailer-controlled source of information. As can be seen, non-brand/retailer-controlled information source (news outlets) does not guarantee trust among Gen Z's individuals.

As can be seen, both brand/retailer-controlled (brands and retailers' websites) and non-brand/retailer controlled sources (news) and social media networks (which cannot be strictly classified as brand/retailer-controlled or non-brand/retailer controlled) are perceived as biased and unreliable information sources.

5.2.2.2.1.2 Reliable

Several sources of information, including certain news outlets, personal experiences, and websites (including brands and retailers' websites), were considered reliable participants. In the previous section, some news outlets were considered biased. News sources are regarded as one of the most significant factors contributing to Gen Z's awareness and knowledge. However, it is essential to note that Gen Z individuals do not equally trust all news outlets. The establishment, reputation and content associated with a given news outlet influence the credibility of the information. In terms of personal experiences, the following participants look at other people's experiences and what they say as an unbiased source of information simply because they do not come directly from brands and retailers. Regarding websites, participants interviewed referred to what they think are reliable and

secure sites for unbiased sources of information. Interestingly, while many think information from a brand and retailer is biased (as discussed in the previous section), some participants have an opposite view. Gen Z interviewees showed that they are aware of the variety and quality of information available on the internet. The following direct quotes reflect these insights:

<p><i>‘...It would be larger media outlet like the BBC, the New York Times, the Times as such...With smaller ones you get a lot of tabloid news. They are unregulated, but with the BBC, everyone has eyes on them, so they cannot exactly publish something and get away with it if it is not true. So I think there are as trustworthy as you are going to get...’ (#M021)</i></p> <p><i>‘BBC...I think they are the most reliable...I guess in comparison to Daily Mail I trust BBC because I know a lot of the Daily Mail news are rumours and later they have been debunked, and there are not as many situations like that [at the] BBC and I know the things that they focus on more are far more important than the Daily Mail.’ (#M022)</i></p> <p><i>‘...Well, typically when a big scandal comes out. It is on BBC News. And all of those big news outlets, I would trust them. ... some are known with their reputation. If a lot of people watched it, liked it and gave it a good rating, I would not think it is rubbish. I find that as an indicator that it is reliable...’ (#M024)</i></p>	<p>News outlets</p>
<p><i>‘...Based on reviews, influencers who talk about the brands and why they are supporting them as well. If you hear about other people’s experiences, it is more credible’. (#M011)</i></p> <p><i>‘...if they are taking steps to be more socially responsible and that was being reviewed by other people ... that would be something I would perhaps have more trust in. If people are saying this is a legitimate effort and they are actually trying to better themselves as a company, I would be like, ‘ok, this makes sense’, and I would look into it ... I think I mainly trust the wider public, so if there is a massive general trend going on and everyone is saying this brand or this company is trying really hard to make a difference with sustainable and environmentally friendly packaging, then I would be more likely to look into that...’ (#M029)</i></p>	<p>Personal experiences</p>
<p><i>‘I probably use websites that I know I can trust ... but I guess you just have to use a few and compare to see what you are getting, see how reliable they are in comparison to – if one is saying this and the other is saying that then you just have to look for a few more to see what is the general concern’. (#M009)</i></p> <p><i>‘...if they got it from a more secure website, then I tend to believe it a bit more. Also, the information that they are posting. If they have</i></p>	<p>Reliable and secure websites, including</p>

<p><i>got statistics, they have got photos of how it affects their lives. So I tend to believe that...’ (#M030)</i></p>	<p>brands and retailers’ websites</p>
<p><i>‘...If it is coming from an organisation or the actual brand itself, then I think maybe it is [more] reliable than coming from a random page...’ (#M015)</i></p> <p><i>‘...I think the most trusted is the actual website of the product because, I mean, as far as I know they are not allowed to lie, so if it is environmentally friendly, they have it listed on the website’. (#M025)</i></p> <p><i>‘...The actual business themselves so if I tell someone something and they tell someone, they might twist it or something. So, I would rather trust the actual business...’ (#M026)</i></p>	

In sum, whether it is news articles, personal experiences, social media or websites, participants decide the credibility of the information based on the evaluation of source trustworthiness (biased, reliable). Specifically, with news articles, participants interviewed rely on aspects such as reputation, numbers of views, and ratings. These are simple cues (heuristic) that help individuals make judgements.

Regarding personal experiences, this is a non-brand/retailer-controlled source, which makes it credible to respondents. Lastly, regarding websites, participants interviewed based their decision regarding the credibility of information on what they think is reliable and secure. In terms of information on brands and retailers’ websites about their socially responsible initiatives, opposite views were expressed. Some participants think internal information coming directly from brands and retailers are more reliable than outside sources. Others (as mentioned in the previous section **5.2.3.1.1. Biased**) think brands and retailers have agendas and images to present, which makes information coming from them less trustworthy.

The data from the ‘biased’ and ‘reliable’ sections suggested that perceptions and evaluations of source trustworthiness can influence the credibility of the information about brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives.

5.2.2.2.2 Content

Under the ‘content’ category, three elements influence the credibility of information about brands and retailers social responsibility (**Table 5.5**).

Table 5.5: Percentage of data about the content elements that influence the credibility of information about brands and retailers social responsibility

The fit between the spokespersons and the content (n=9)	Who promotes, produces, or discusses the content (n=20)	How the information is communicated (n=20)
23%	57%	57%

5.2.2.2.2.1 How the information is communicated

How the information is communicated could affect the credibility of information about brands and retailers' social responsibility. Social media allows information to be changed according to the intent of the original poster. Therefore, the way information is communicated on social media is not always associated with the credibility of the information. Examples of this view are as follows:

'...Instagram and Facebook just promote things in a way. Instagram is what the young generation uses a lot, and it is kind of promoting things and makes things more ideal for consumers ... just ideological of how things should be. You should not always trust that. Things are made [to look] better than they actually are. So kind of portraying different image...' (**#M004**)

'...I think if someone has bad experiences somewhere, they would just bash them. Sometimes those posts go viral. But, the companies always do their best to make amends, and I do not think you can judge someone's bad experience on the whole company. So I do not trust all social media.' (**#M014**)

'...because such a vast amount of people [are] on it (social media). So many different opinions. People with their own agendas. A lot of it is just some random person spilling something that is not true, or if it is, it is a rumour. Just a bit dodgy.' (**#M022**)

The abovementioned responses oppose other participants' responses regarding the way the information is communicated on social media, indicating its reliability:

'...One good thing on Twitter is that, for example, if someone tweeted something with a video and picture or article, a lot of quotes tweet it and write something. You can do this thing on Twitter, where you can see all the quotes that link to the tweet. I click on that link, I read whatever everyone is saying about that tweet, then look at replies. If you click on that link, everyone the quote tweeted what they said and replied to that. So that is one way to get to understand what happened. Did someone explain it more in detail? What are people saying about it? What people's opinions are. But I do not let that make up my opinion. I look into it more. I read something, and I am not completely sure I just search it. You can ask what something means, and someone will reply to it on Twitter...' (**#M020**)

'...I get a lot of it from Twitter just because it is sociable, and at the same time, they have sections in news and stuff like that, and you can just be scrolling, and you see random videos – you can click on it, and you find out more information. For me, that's probably the most effective communication channel at the moment because I feel like a lot of people are on Twitter... I think Twitter is so diverse – it is not just one person's opinion or bias really, so it kind of opens up the communication channel ... They have sections like live news and stuff like that and just because I think essentially it is coming from a trusted site ... For example, whether it is something happening in America like ABC News. I just feel like it has everything in one place. So, if somebody has a comment and they have a link to another article, then I kind of look at it...' (#M003)

People have different preferences in terms of information and content about brands and retailers social responsibility, and they rely on different aspects to decide the credibility of information. For example, the following quotes show preferences of easy to digest content:

'...How are they framing their messaging to make you believe they are socially responsible...If they are too deliberate with their wording or be like – we planted this many trees, we are doing this many more next year. Kind of be specific about it. I am going to be like, are you really? But if they are kind of broad term about it, like, 'we focus on this'. It is easier to digest and not question it'. (#M005)

'...I trust social media more because especially it communicates in a more user-friendly way. For example, as a general consumer, I am not knowledgeable on the environment. I am not an expert. If they communicate to me in a way that is easy for me to understand while scrolling through Instagram, then I am like, this is interesting. Or they say something stands out for me; for example, this is really affecting some places and we are helping, and they show a picture that really stands out. That often really helps. Again if it is not targeted towards me specifically, then I am more likely to believe it ... When they are trying to push too hard, for example, they send me a promotional email about them being socially responsible – I would be like, 'ok, you are trying to get business from me'. On the other hand, if they are not pushing so hard to me specifically. If they are just having something on their Instagram, then it is like, 'ok, they are just informing people'. Maybe I [can] trust that...' (#M032)

On the contrary, the following quotes show a preference for specific content with statistics:

'...when brands say things like they pay their workers more, I want to see how much they pay, how much you pay, I want to see it. I want the proof. I think it is a fraud. I don't think they do it for the right reason ... When they say ethical, prove to me that it is ethical. We had no proof. I don't believe what they say ... I want to see

them say, 'our plastic has been 50% less polluted to the environment than last year', for example. I want to see that. I want to be it audited as well...' (#Mo08)

'...Probably BBC. Because they use quite good statistics and sources of information ... I feel like it is what I grew up with ... And Ted Talks, they usually have researchers or people who know quite a bit about that topic, and they do it themselves instead of one person writing it down. So they have multiple people doing these talks or these articles on what they are trying to present on. So I feel like Ted talk can be reliable because they know and they have done their research on what they are going to talk about'. (#Mo34)

The above examples clearly show the difference in terms of preferable content in relation to the credibility of the information. As can be seen, reliable statistics and easy to digest content, including photos and videos, can help decide the credibility of the information.

For other participants, the credibility of information could come with additional facts, links, articles and other people's opinions.

'...if the brand is posting on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook etc., if they are the one posted with no comments or reviews to back them up, then I do not trust it...' (#Mo25)

:'...A lot of good ones do like Q&A about the issues or something and a lot of people can be like, 'oh it is not true', and you can see people's words, explain, back it up with facts with links and articles about it educating people. People tell you to your face that you should do more research yourself as well. If someone just claims to be an expert, whether what they say is 100% correct, you always try to find facts and opinions. That gives credibility...' (#Mo31)

The way information is advertised can affect judgement regarding the credibility of the information. For example:

'...You see those adverts on Instagram, and there are only like 2-3 comments. I do not trust that regardless of what they are saying because no one is there to back them up...' (#Mo25)

'...The company puts the ad there themselves; there is nothing to back it up. And if you do not know the brand, then you have no reason to believe what they are saying'. (#Mo28)

As can be seen, Gen Z individuals consider how information is communicated via adverts to weigh its credibility. The participants interviewed did not seem to be significantly influenced by information communicated via adverts. They felt adverts only show the best parts or the information is portrayed to make things better than they are.

Participants expressed concerns regarding how information is interpreted or written, which affects the credibility of the content. For example:

‘...everyone has their own reactions, and they might have the last 20 minutes of a video, and I have the first 20 minutes of the video. We have the same video but have different purposes...’ (#M010)

‘...because people have their own input when sharing it with different added things to them. It loses the original purpose and reliability as well’. (#M023)

Gen Z individuals have different preferences in terms of the desired information and content regarding socially responsible practices. The way the information is communicated via different platforms can affect its credibility. Evidence of the use of different information cues is apparent.

5.2.2.2.2 Who promotes, produces or discusses content

The credibility of information about brands and retailers being socially responsible comes from the person who promotes, produces or discusses the content of the socially responsible practice. For example, information from friends and family is credible which can be seen from the comments below:

‘...If it is a friend – for example, I have a friend who works in this plastic making company, I will trust this person more because they use the machine, they have been part of the process, so I trust them more. I think it is down to how well do I know the person and close the experience that they had ... because you can show things under the different lights depending on your agenda ... And I think unless I see it myself or unless I know someone who has had their first time experiences...’ (#M006)

‘...Because it is someone you know, you are more likely to trust them. Like if it is your friends, your family, you are more likely to trust them. So you would believe the information that you are told.’ (#M016)

Information credibility also depends on whether the person is considered a reliable source or an expert in that field. These views can be seen as follows:

‘It depends on the person. I know people who are environmentally conscious and do their research, and they know what they are talking about. And they have thoroughly researched whatever it is they [are] passionate about. Whereas you have other people who do not have the whole story and generalise information and statements and convince themselves that they are correct for their spreading of information in a very convincing manner because they think they are correct. So it just depends on the person...’ (#M009)

‘...I think if they use the brand and they [are] sort of advertising it without meaning to get big companies to pay them to advertise it. If I know the person would associate with the brand anyway, then I am more likely to believe that it is actually a good brand. ... It depends on the product and the person.... If I do not know the person, I do not really have an opinion.’ (#M028)

Regarding social media, different opinions about the credibility of the information associated with people on social media can be seen below:

‘...I think it depends on whom I am talking to. Sometimes people hear things and tell you, but they don’t tell you the whole story. So, if someone tells me something, I would like to research it myself just to see if it is reliable. Are they saying something reliable? Because sometimes people do not tell the 100% truth. Or sometimes they may not like the brand and tell you they are doing this ... Because I think if someone has a bad experience somewhere, they would just bash them. Sometimes those posts go viral. But the companies always do their best to make amends, and I do not think you can judge someone’s bad experience on the whole company. So, I do not trust all social media’. (#M014)

‘...Because loads of people are on it [social media] and everyone is in competition with that brand. People might just put up something that is not true’. (#M015)

‘...Maybe it depends on whom you follow. Certain people can be reliable sources you can trust. You may see some obvious evidence ... With some people, you can still get the sense of that a person being truthful even though they get paid to do so ... I would say I trust the person I follow on social media rather than the social media platform itself ... you can see if they actually care or seem like they care about the environment or they care about the world in general’. (#M001)

‘...for example, the verified accounts thing like that I do often tend to believe what they say. I probably trust that more than, like, big media ... I guess I judge the credibility by who produces or distributes what I am watching’. (#M033)

Together with many features, social media allows people to share their personal experiences. On the one hand, people on social media can exhibit bias towards brands and retailers. As a result, they taint the credibility of such information. On the other hand, Gen Z members perceive that people on social media can be reliable; hence the information they post is credible.

Similarly, two opposite views appear regarding the credibility of the content coming from brands and retailers. On the one hand, participants believe that brands and retailers have their purposes for putting up certain content (see 5.2.2.2.1.1). On the other hand, content from brands and retailers’ websites is considered more reliable than ‘a random page’, which can be seen below:

‘...If it is coming from an organisation or the actual brand itself, then I think maybe it is [more] reliable than coming from a random page...’ (#M015)

‘...I think the most trusted is the actual website of the product because I mean, as far as I know, they are not allowed to lie. So, if it is environmentally friendly, they have [it] listed on the website’. (#M025)

‘...The actual business themselves, so if I tell someone something and they tell someone, they might twist it or something. So, I would rather trust the actual business. Oh, we start to deal with Fairtrade or something. I would rather hear it from them than a media outlet’. (#M026)

There is a mixture of opinions on the credibility of information coming from people on social media, as well as from brands and retailers. This finding is consistent with and strengthens the results regarding biased and reliable sources. Gen Z individuals rely on both non-brand/retailer-controlled and brand/retailer-controlled sources for information. However, when it comes to the credibility of the information, more Gen Z individuals tend to rely on non-brand/retailer-controlled sources – including neutral or unbiased sources such as news and articles, personal experiences, trusted websites – than brand/retailer-controlled sources (brands and retailers’ website). Regarding social media, which cannot be strictly categorised as non-brand/retailer controlled or brand/retailer-controlled source, certain conditions must be present.

5.2.2.2.3 The fit between spokespersons and content

The credibility of information is also assessed by evaluating the fit between the spokesperson and content. For example:

‘...If I know the account has a history of doing a similar thing like pointing this out about the brand or pointing that out about that brand and it is true, so I know I can trust their words going forward...and obviously, nowadays social media verifies a person’s identity if they are important enough. So, I check to see that. If it is an expert, I check to see they’re a verified person and then check their background to see they can say they are an economist, but I would just google their name to see if they actually have a job. And then see what they posted about before just to double-check that they are a reliable source’. (#M021)

‘... mainly someone like studied that or like have a degree in that or like some sort of interest rather than just cover it for the sake of the article and the praise, then I guess it would make it more reliable’. (#M031)

As can be seen, the participants interviewed based their judgement of the credibility of the information about brands and retailers’ social responsibility on the fit or congruence between the spokesperson and the content mentioned. This congruence can be

demonstrated through the history and consistency of posting of similar content as well as the interest and knowledge of the person or organisation regarding the content mentioned.

To sum up, content elements such as the fit between the spokesperson and content, who promotes, produces or discusses the socially responsible content and how the information is communicated all contribute to the credibility of the information about brands and retailers' level of social responsibility.

5.2.2.2.3 Disbelief or distrust in the credibility of information

Individuals interviewed disbelieved or distrusted the information they encountered about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Therefore, the following views reflect scepticism among Gen Z individuals towards information and communications about socially responsible initiatives.

'...I would be sceptical at first. I would not believe it straightaway... I take them with a grain of salt is an easy way to describe it. So, as I said before, I have a certain degree of trust. I cannot trust it straight away because it is still word of mouth if you think about it. I understand if people go to a high extent of research, but I do not necessarily believe straightaway... So like, making a claim on plastic – it is not something to be taken lightly. So I would also be sceptical, especially with plastic...' (#M026)

'...I think anything brands and retailers [are] saying upfront, anything they put out, I would not necessarily trust the face value because they always have an agenda when they are putting it out at a time for a certain demographic of people. So that, I would not necessarily trust ... but if a brand [is] coming out and like straight away saying we are making all of these efforts, I think most of the time you take that with a pinch of salt because, at the end of the day, the main aim of a company is to make money ... I think mostly nowadays you cannot really trust anything on the internet because everything you searched coming back at you ... So in terms of what people are portraying it is not really the reality of what is going on ... So that is why I said the internet is not a great source of truthfulness ... On Instagram or YouTube, there is not a lot you can do to fact check all the information ... So I do not know [if] there is a lot you can do. So it is there, but you never really know if it is 100% reliable.' (#M029)

Table 5.6: Factors influencing trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives.

Evidence, including impacts of socially responsible initiatives (an indicator of scepticism).
Multiple cues (an indicator of higher scepticism).
Reputation.
Information type and credibility.
How brands and retailers present themselves, including reasons for being socially responsible, the fit among the nature of the brands or retailers, their socially responsible initiatives and their management teams.
Transparency.
Size and scale.
History of socially responsible behaviour.
Quantity of socially responsible initiatives.
Charitable donations.
Matching personal values.
Pricing.

5.2.3.1 Evidence

Gen Z individuals were asked to name factors that would influence their trust when brands and retailers say they are socially responsible. ‘*Evidence*’ appears to be one of the most influential factors, which can be seen as follows:

<p><i>‘...I think I’d like to see the evidence of you being socially responsible, whether it is the type of clothing you are producing – if it is made up of recyclable materials or half recyclable materials – and how you actually get your goods to your customers: do you use brown paper bags or plastic and if you give any of your proceeds to charity ... I think just mainly evidence. If I see one award part of [a] trustworthy group – part of B corps group – then I would be more likely to trust them...’ (#M027)</i></p>
<p><i>‘...if they have stamp and evidence if they have something to show me that yes they are socially responsible again: logos, items they are showing have a logo on it or if it could just be review from other people ... I guess I first think about having the statistics because, again, that is hardcore...if they have got statistics, they have got photos of how it affects their lives. So I tend to believe that ... I have to look at what they are saying in particular – if it is just on the statement and it lacks evidence, statistics to back it up, then I am less likely to believe’. (#M030)</i></p>

5.2.3.1.1 The impacts of socially responsible initiatives

This category further specifies that when it comes to trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible practices, the ‘*impacts*’ of socially responsible behaviours are considered influential among Gen Z interviewees. The following quotes illustrate this insight:

‘... They can claim a lot of things, but again, going back to ensure they are doing things – but is it actually effective?... I would eventually side with the one that has a greater impact on what they are doing...’ (#M013)

‘...The impacts of what they do are more important...’ (#M024)

‘...You have to actually see the differences they are making. I feel like once the companies put resources, not into maximising profit, but making sure that putting their resources somewhere – you can see there are differences being made. I guess ... Once you can see companies’ active efforts, not just the front but to actually improve what is around them, then yeah you will be able to trust them...’ (#M035)

5.2.3.2 Multiple cues

Importantly, Gen Z participants rely on multiple factors that suggest brands and retailers are socially responsible, as can be seen below:

‘...Multiple platforms for my research. Because I don’t think one is reliable. I think you have to visit a few to see the truth ... I think it’s a combination of their campaign, what I feel about their campaign ... I think it depends on the brand’s history. So if the brand is a successful brand, what has been said about the brand before – their activities they have done, and also I look at people’s comments to see what they have to say ... So I think it depends on the mixture of what I know about the brand and what has been said about the brand for me to decide ... I think it is not just about how long they have been doing it, but also like if they are going to do it right...’ (#M012)

‘... Multiple because you never trust one source. It is like history. You have to look at different sources to find out the whole truth ... Where the claim has come from. Generally, who has said what? You want verifications, so evidence to back up what they said. You want public opinions. You want to hear what everyone said...’ (#M023)

This sub-theme was initially coded as ‘need to cross-check information’ (a node). The initial node was then coded as a child node under the central theme ‘factors influencing trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives’. Gen Z participants mentioned that they need to cross-check information from different sources to believe that brands and retailers are socially responsible. The initial node ‘need to cross-check information’ was changed to ‘multiple cues’.

5.2.3.3 Reputation

The reputation of a brand or a retailer regarding social responsibility influences Gen Z’s trust towards that brand or retailer’s socially responsible activities. This insight is reflected as follows:

‘...if they had been in, like, scandal, I would probably use that as a quite important piece of information to decode if they are being truthful or not ... If it was, like, bad before but they changed, then that is fine. But if it was awful before, like terrible things, I would be, like, I do not really care if you are changing now. It would make it less appealing to me ... There are brands I know that have had a bad reputation, and they always make me wary about ... buying from them. It is always there. It is in the media as well. When there is a big news story, it is everywhere. You subconsciously get information about that...’ (#M022)

‘...Also I look at what other people believe about this brand because it is their reputation. If they have a good reputation as a brand, I am more likely to believe as well...’ (#M030)

‘...If I know the brand has a reputation, say, not being socially responsible, they waste this much or they treat their workers in a certain way. I feel like that reputation I heard of would definitely affect my trust and my view on what they are doing...’ (#M033)

Reputation was frequently mentioned alongside a company’s history (indication of multiple cues used) of socially responsible behaviour, which influences trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives.

5.2.3.4 Information type and credibility

This sub-theme contains participants’ responses, indicating that the type of information (non-brand/retailer-controlled), as well as information credibility, influences their trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives. In terms of the type of information, non-brand/retailer-controlled sources are referred to as something that influences their trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible practices (for additional direct quotes, please see **Appendix N**).

<p><i>‘...I probably based largely on reviews, so like what other people have to say, the positive the negative [experiences] that they had, their experiences with that brand. I guess you can try it for yourself really’. (#M009)</i></p> <p><i>‘...searching online, it tells you about it, but because on the company’s page... if you want to look into it, you should look up other news articles and other people’s opinions ... Based on reviews, influencers who talk about the brands and why they are supporting them as well. If you hear about other people’s experiences, it is more credible...’ (#M011)</i></p>	<p>Personal experiences, opinions, reviews (n=20)</p>
<p><i>‘...Without research, I would not say I necessarily trust it...’ (#M017)</i></p>	<p>Own research (n=14)</p>

<p><i>‘...I feel like I have to see if they are actually doing anything or have they always been like this. I have to do some research, basically ... I read something, and [if] I am not completely sure, I just search it. You can ask what something means, and someone will reply to it on Twitter. But yeah, that is how I start to gather my information...’ (#M020)</i></p>	
<p><i>‘...The documentary is a good source – for me, it would be 90% trustworthy ... say if it is BBC, I trust it more than some other grey area like sketchy I have not heard of before...’ (#M026)</i></p> <p><i>‘...Perhaps like more neutral source news, like BBC. Not politicians. I know I would look for the source of information I know is verified – not in the Instagram way but societal way, if that makes sense. Maybe a journalist that I trust or an article from BBC. I do sort of trust the BBC with what they say, sort of neutral and non-biased. Maybe something like outlet like that ... What they are doing is picked up by the media, the television programme or the news or maybe the Instagram I trust then I feel like, ok, it is more credible...’ (#M033)</i></p>	<p>Trusted media and news sources (n=14)</p>
<p><i>‘As I mentioned, reviews. Reviews from people, say my family, who has shopped there – from their experiences. Articles as well about the company. That’s how I usually give my trust to the company’. (#M016)</i></p> <p><i>‘...I think opinions of other people whom you know well. So like friends. What they think of the brand. If they think it is socially responsible. So outside people’s opinions...’ (#M023)</i></p>	<p>Friends and family (n=6)</p>
<p><i>‘... To be honest, that would be Facebook groups, so like RSPCA, WWF or something people are passionate about, there would be a group about it ... I mean reliable sources and campaigns ... An activist group, actually, not somebody else posting. A group where people come together, establish an agenda and a name and what they want to achieve, then I would trust things in that group...’ (#M012)</i></p>	<p>Non-profit organisations (n=3)</p>

According to participants, their own research for information would make the information they come across in the first place more trustworthy. They do their research instead of taking the information at face value. This response reflects the systematic route of information processing.

As can be seen, the credibility of information is associated with the source of information (non-brand/retailer-controlled sources), which in turn influences trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives. Therefore, perceptions and evaluations of the information type and credibility influence the scepticism towards communication about socially responsible initiatives. Scepticism towards information-related factors about

brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives can be seen as a dimension of the overall scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

5.2.3.5 How brands and retailers present themselves

This first-tier sub-theme contains three categories that further illustrate elements of how brands and retailers present themselves and their socially responsible initiatives, which in turn influences trust among Gen Z individuals.

Gen Z participants consider the ways they communicate information about being socially responsible. This insight can be seen from the following direct quotes:

'I guess advertising. The way it advertises. If you are shouting about being socially responsible and socially conscious and all this and that. It leads you to ask, 'how much of that is genuine? How much of that are you trying to prove a point?' (#M009)

'...Probably the way you present your information and if you got facts to back it up ... I would probably look into their products or if they had any advertising campaign and if they had any fact or figure to actually support what they were saying as well ... I would probably want to see or hear the way in which you are doing that and what you replace it with as well...' (#M028)

'...I guess first of all you have to look at their products or whatever they are selling to see if they are actually environmentally friendly. Then, of course, the way they are marketing and branding and things like that – like, is the packaging completely plastic or is it even recyclable plastic or are they doing anything with their money and profits afterwards...' (#M029)

5.2.3.5.1 Reasons for socially responsible behaviour

Brands and retailers' acknowledgement of reasons for socially responsible behaviour impacts trust among the interviewed members of Gen Z, which can be seen below:

'...I feel like sometimes some brands, they have aims and the reasons behind their brands and stuff. Sometimes they centre it around an issue. If you know, this is what the company's based on, you are less likely to doubt them or their responsibilities...' (#M020)

'... if I see that they say why they did that, then yeah, I am more likely to trust it...' (#M026)

'...I guess it is not only 'they are socially responsible', ticks the box, but they are also going out of their way to educate people – 'oh we are socially responsible because of x tonnes of plastic goes into the ocean and kills the marine life, and a lot of plastic ends up in the landfill' ... They kind of give the reasons behind their cause rather than just saying, 'we are socially responsible' ... I would also maybe ask

why they chose to do it, why do they choose to use recycled plastic, not 100% biodegradable...’ (#M031)

5.2.3.5.2 The fit between the nature of the brands and retailers and their socially responsible activities

According to the interviews with Gen Z members, trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives is influenced by the fit or congruence between brands and retailers and their socially responsible actions. This view can be reflected as follows:

‘...Every company has their own profile ... An oil company would not care. If they said, ‘oh, we are going to be more environmentally friendly’, I would not trust that. Because you are an oil company, what can you do? But if it was a green energy company, then yeah, I know that is what they are all about. I trust what they have to say if they say we are going to be eco-friendly ... Because obviously people who do something extremely out of character, you find it suspicious...’ (#M021)

‘...Is it something environmentally friendly? Is it suitable, so like, if Shell came out and says they are socially responsible, I would not agree...’ (#M029)

‘...If it was out of character, then I would not trust [it]. If it fits in with the patterns, I would be more inclined to believe it...’ (#M033)

5.2.3.5.3 The management teams

For Gen Z participants, the management or representatives of a brand or a retailer can be an influential factor when it comes to trust towards their socially responsible practices:

‘...I suppose their history and people who are in charge. ... Let’s say a company has a reputation for being not so socially responsible and I am going to see if they had a change of management or something. Because it was the same people last year who did not care and turned around this year and started caring – I have to check...’ (#M021)

‘...But it also depends on who is running the one who has started recently. All of a sudden, someone could come in and change everything. That would obviously change the whole thing rather than change to fit into what everyone wants...’ (#M022)

‘I probably look at the position of the person who makes the statement at the company. If someone is in a high position, then I would tend to believe them more. Maybe I look at what this person would gain from being socially responsible, as in, are they trying to make a significant impact or small impact; are they trying to be more environmentally friendly rather than just for money...’ (#M030)

5.2.3.6 Transparency

According to participants, being ‘transparent’ about socially responsible initiatives is important in influencing trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible behaviours. This insight is reflected as follows:

‘...I would say extremely transparent about everything, really. I know with the smaller brands, it is easier ... To me, socially responsible is when you are really, really transparent about all [the] social responsibilities you have ... so to me, mainly it is the transparency. How transparent they are about all the stuff and how eager they are to tell you about it. It could just be their marketing strategy: they could just hire people who are passionate about it to tell you about it, but does it matter? Because then people will educate you about it, so if they are transparent and you kind of see their aims rather than just kind of in the background ... Maybe to an extent if a brand is transparent about what are they still working on and what perhaps is not perfect about them ... No one is expecting a brand to change – a 180 degrees turn overnight. But also it is important to look at the progress they are going through to kind of see their goal for the future...’ (#M031)

‘...I feel like if I have seen a brand maybe has spoken on a topic before. Say, if it was plastic packaging and then they made some changes, maybe not fast changes, maybe posted on their social media accounts about social responsibility, and now they actually make the changes and actually implement the changes to their packaging. I feel like I am more likely to be like, oh ok, they have actually changed with progress rather than suddenly, ‘oh look, we are zero waste’. I would suspect the intention behind big drastic change...’ (#M033)

5.2.3.7 Size and scale

The size (big versus small) of brands and retailers and the scale of their socially responsible activities are considered factors that influence trust among Gen Z individuals interviewed (systematic processing). While some participants associate trust with smaller brands and retailers, others trust bigger brands or retailers when it comes to socially responsible practices. The following direct quotes reveal these contrasting views:

‘...I think there is a correlation between the size of the corporation and the amount of social responsibilities ... I think the level of social responsibility decreases as the bigger the company is. I think the small local businesses are doing the most for the local communities and the people, whereas the bigger corporations they ... seem to be just enough to avoid heat from the media ... But I think in general, it can be safe to say the bigger the company, the less responsibility they carry out ... Small businesses, they are the ones who are the most genuine. Mainly because you can see what they do on a day-to-day basis. And there is not much to hide. Normally it is that one store; that is all they have. You can see what they do...’ (#M013)

**Smaller brands/
retailers
and trust
(n=16 or
46%)**

<p><i>‘...Generally, I do not think that the larger companies are necessarily doing what they should. And I know a lot of them find ways to avoid places that do enforce socially responsible manufacturing. I know people at Apple and stuff – they are dodgy. I know that smaller businesses, a lot of them use that as a selling point – that they are doing things right, but I do not think the bigger companies care that much ... I do not see anyone willing to change, especially big companies ... So like the big companies say, ‘oh we are doing this trying to save this and that’ so then they don’t get blasted in the media...’ (#M022)</i></p>	
<p><i>‘...I have seen little differences, not massive, just a little margin sort of differences from brands and little shops ... It is often like I see smaller brands doing it or maybe the more expensive ones. And the bigger or larger ones are the ones not making those small changes, but they are being bought more and consumed more ... I feel like the bigger the brand, the less likely I trust their efforts in making changes. Whereas with the smaller brands, I feel like they are small, they are not making much money, but they are still doing these things. It is more of a genuine effort...’ (#M033)</i></p>	
<p><i>‘...To a certain extent, I trust the larger companies because they got more on the line to lose if they are not socially responsible...’ (#M017)</i></p>	<p>Bigger brands/retailers and trust (n=4 or 11%)</p>
<p><i>‘If you are a brand telling me you are doing this and doing this and you are a big company to email me, I think they would not lie. I believe the face value of that. I would like to think I can trust them ... I think it matters on the scale. So if a small one is saying they are doing this and doing that, then it is like ok, how do you do that much as a small company?’ (#M019)</i></p>	
<p><i>‘...With the brand name that is – big, huge brands – if they are making that claim, I trust them because they have a lot to lose if they lie. But if it is a start-up, a brand that I do not know, then I would not be that trusting...’ (#M025)</i></p>	

5.2.3.8 History of socially responsible behaviour

The table below summarises the effect of the historical length of socially responsible behaviour on trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives among Gen Z:

Table 5.7: Percentage of data on the effect of the length of historical socially responsible behaviour on trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives

The length affects trust (n=16)	The length does not affect trust (n=8)	Shorter length can be trusted (n=10)
46%	23%	29%

The historical length of socially responsible behaviours among brands and retailers affects trust among participants. On the one hand, shorter history of being socially responsible negatively affects trust. On the other hand, longer historical trends make brands and retailers more trustworthy among some Gen Z individuals. This insight can be seen as follows:

<p><i>‘The one that has recently started, if their main purpose is to be carbon neutral or as low as possible. They pay their workers a fair wage and stuff like that. If they started out in that direction, I would trust them more. With the other that has moved to that direction, then I would be more distrusting...’ (#M007)</i></p> <p><i>‘...If one has been doing it and it is what they are known for, I would be much more inclined to trust them because that is their image. The one that has recently started, I would have some questions. If they are in the same category as the other brand, I would probably think, like, the other brand influences them to up their game. So maybe that is why they changed. They want to follow the one who has been socially responsible to compete with them on the same level...’ (#M020)</i></p>	<p>Shorter history and trust</p>
<p><i>‘...If they are doing it for years, then they are committed to their ways. They are trying to make the world a better place. So, I think that I would trust them in that sense but obviously, after doing an information search, like, is it a true thing...’ (#M007)</i></p> <p><i>‘...I look at one’s history and if they have been there for years and have all these experiences and know their causes and there have been more years people talk about them and kind of point out the issues with them. Whereas if one has a shorter history, I would look at what they say have been, like, proven to be correct to a certain extent. When one has not been in the market for long, for people to see if what they say is actually true or they just put on a face of being sustainable. I trust both, but if I pick one to trust more, I would pick the one that has a longer history of being socially responsible just because they have more time to prove themselves...’ (#M031)</i></p> <p><i>‘...When one has a longer history you can see their core values. It would not just be a coincidence or a trend for them. I guess it is something that they care about. I want to say that another company is not the same but I guess it would be more trustworthy to have a longer history of being socially responsible...’ (#M035)</i></p>	<p>Longer history and trust</p>

The influence of more prolonged historical behaviours of being socially responsible on their trust is apparent. However, the participants also agree that brands and retailers with shorter histories of socially responsible behaviour still deserve a chance to be appreciated and have the potential to be trusted:

‘...One can be doing it for a long time, and one can only start recently, and they are taking a new perspective to become socially responsible. So I feel like people should give them a chance. And people can actually trust them. Because they actually want to show they want to help the community, the people. So you should trust them. If they will not try to be socially responsible, then that’s maybe when you want to trust the one who has been doing it...’ (#M016)

‘...If one has been socially responsible, I would be more likely to trust them, but just because someone has started to become socially responsible, it does not mean what they are saying is not true because it could be their second chance. So I definitely – I start to trust them more, but it could be a couple of months later they could go back to what they were doing. So I would a bit wary of the one that has a shorter history of being socially responsible, but I still [would] give them a second chance...’ (#M030)

The length of history of being socially responsible does not affect trust towards brands and retailers’ socially responsibility among Gen Z interviewees. The following direct quotes show more of this insight:

‘...The one that started later they might do it better than the company has been responsible for ages ... It is not really a length thing ... As long as people start changing the length of how long you have been socially responsible, I don’t think it matters...’ (#M005)

‘...for me, it does not matter how long they are doing it. At the end of the day, the fact that a company is making an effort to change, even if it is a tiny thing, that is enough...’ (#M026)

Overall, regarding trust, more participants are influenced by the length of history of being socially responsible than those who are not influenced by it. Among those influenced by the length of time, the effect differs between shorter and longer periods. Interestingly, shorter lengths can be trusted and should be appreciated among participants. Taken together, having a shorter length of history of being socially responsible may or may not lead to distrust among Gen Z individuals.

5.2.3.9 Quantity of socially responsible initiatives

On the one hand, participants (19 out of 35) would trust a brand or retailer that works on many aspects of socially responsible initiatives. On the other hand, participants (20 out of 35) would trust brands and retailers who try and make an effort to focus on one aspect of social responsibility as they believe one aspect is still an effort and can make a difference. Their expressions can be reflected as follows:

'I would be more inclined to trust the one who is doing a bit more because they look at the whole picture, not one element ... if they have the capacity to look after one thing, they can look after something else ... I am still more inclined to trust the one who is doing more'. (#M017)

'If it turns out that one is just being socially responsible in terms of the well-being and healthcare for the animals, for example, if in regard to that they are only looking at that one thing and then not looking at anything else, I would probably not trust that. Because if you do want to take the actual socially responsible standpoint, there is a lot more you can do about it ... So if one brand just focuses on one thing, I would not trust that. I trust companies going for a couple more things'. (#M029)

'It is unrealistic to expect everyone to be perfect at everything. You could be vegan but still consume plastic packaging. It does not mean you are a bad person because you are trying to help one aspect of the environment over the others. You still help. Little help, but you are still doing your part. It is unfair to say you cannot trust them because they focus on one aspect. Especially with small brands, they might not have the funding for all the problems, but they might be focusing on not having sweatshops but have higher carbon emissions. You cannot necessarily expect everything to happen all at once. I think it is unfair'. (#M009)

'I think I would probably trust brands that focus on one aspect of being socially responsible because they are more likely to make an actual difference. Whereas if a brand comes straight out and says, 'we are doing this, this, this', I feel like I am a bit more sceptical and be like, 'ok, how are you actually doing that and how is it viable' because they need to make money as well. So I think I definitely trust and sort of being more on board with a brand tackling a larger problem rather than lots of different problems'. (#M033)

Some people who said they would trust brands and retailers who work on more social responsibility aspects also said that companies with less socially responsible initiatives are trustworthy.

5.2.3.10 Charitable donations

Donations to charity influence Gen Z's trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The following quotes demonstrate this insight:

'I suppose the company history if they have a tracked record for being charitable and stuff I can trust and they are genuine'. (#M021)

'I think I'd like to see the evidence of you being socially responsible whether it is on the type of clothing you are producing, if it is made of recyclable materials or half recyclable materials and how you actually get your goods to your customers, do you use brown paper bags or plastic and if you give any of your proceeds to charity'. (#M027)

The people who mentioned charitable donations also noted other factors influencing their trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Thus, they use multiple cues to decide whether to trust these companies.

5.2.3.11 Matching personal values

The congruence between personal values and socially responsible practices influences the trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible practices. This view is reflected as follows:

'...I would definitely go for the companies that support whatever I think is important. For example, people care a lot about plastic in the sea. I think it is really important. It is something, and we need to take care of something I like to talk about, but I know it would be more important for me to spend money on something related to child labour...' (#M008)

'...I would trust them if their values relate to mine. If they seem authentic...' (#M011)

'...I would probably pick the one that is closer to my personal values in terms of social responsibility...' (#M031)

The people who mentioned the congruence between their values also mentioned other factors influencing their trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Thus, they also use multiple cues.

5.2.3.12 Pricing

Low pricing versus higher pricing reflects the quality and sustainability aspect of production. The following direct quotes indicate pricing as a factor that potentially influences trust among Gen Z individuals regarding brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

'...if it is not a massive company, mass production. For example, I think H&M is a big brand; their clothes are cheap. The price is cheap, whereas handmade stuff, which requires skills ... will be reflected in pricing, and you pay for what you get. It lasts longer – it is not a mass production kind of thing...' (#M007)

'...If I see your shirt costs £5, I know you are lying somewhere because it costs a lot of money to deal with chemicals not to put it in the sea. To put them in the right place, there is obviously a cost. Child labour – if you do not use them, it costs you more if you pay them the right wage. All of that will go towards the total costs, and I should be paying the reflective prices. If it is only £5, I know there is something wrong...' (#M008)

'...Their products can be overpriced, but you know you use something good. They do not test on animals. Products you use are completely natural...' (#M020)

It has been demonstrated in the CSR context that a high level of scepticism leads to more negative attitudes and responses (Elving, 2012; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Joireman et al., 2018; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Accordingly, the types of motives attributed to brands and retailers reflect scepticism levels towards the matter under discussion. The association of only profit-based interest to brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives shows a strong presence of high levels of scepticism. However, Gen Z participants also associated brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives with both profit-based interest and others' welfare. This result led to the interpretation that there are different levels of scepticism. Thus, the result is consistent with findings from previous studies, which suggests that CSR scepticism differs among consumers (Elving, 2012; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Joireman et al., 2018; Mantovani et al., 2017; Skarmeas et al., 2014; Zhang & Hanks, 2017).

The findings also demonstrate that within the context of the socially responsible initiative (different from corporate societal marketing and CRM), consumer attributions of motive (profit-based interest versus others' welfare) reflect different levels of scepticism (high versus low) which in turn influence consumer perceptions and evaluations of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and motives. The results of different attributions also support previous studies that suggest that different levels of scepticism lead to different consumer responses and evaluations (Anuar & Mohamad, 2012; Anuar et al., 2013; Bae, 2020; Diehl et al., 2008; Elving, 2012; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Feick & Gierl, 1996; Fenko et al., 2016; Foreh & Grier, 2003; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Joireman et al., 2018; Mantovani et al., 2017; Mendini et al., 2018; Romani et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2020; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Yu, 2020; Zhang & Hanks, 2017).

Under the attribution of profit-based interest, trend (egoistic attribution), competition (egoistic), consumers (strategic attribution), media pressure (egoistic) and legislative or regulatory pressure (egoistic) were perceived to be the causes of brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviours. This finding means that brands and retailers are perceived as reactive rather than proactive in terms of social responsibility, which led to the negative attribution motive. This finding supports the work of Becker-Olsen et al. (2006), Groza et al. (2011) and Lee (2020), indicating that initiatives that are seen as reactive lead to less favourable consumer responses. Causes such as sustainability, money/cost-saving, brand image and reputation (egoistic attributions) are consistent with those identified in Schmeltz's study (2012), including brand image, competition, profit

and morality. Overall, the causal explanations from the current study are more comprehensive than the concrete internal/personal and external/situational/environmental factors conceptualised by the original AT approach.

According to Skarmeas et al. (2014), multiple combinations of attributions lead to scepticism development about a retailer's social responsibility credentials. Vlachos et al. (2009) also point out that increasingly suspicious consumers ascribe multiple attributions of CSR motives. The data from this current study shows that all participants attributed a negative attribution of motive to brands and retailers, of which many only associated the socially responsible behaviours with profit-based interest, which was related to multiple causal explanations. Thus, this finding of multiple causal explanations is consistent with Skarmeras et al.'s study (2014) and Vlachos et al. (2009) regarding the multiple attributions leading to scepticism and the effect of level of scepticism on consumer attribution, respectively. The findings also show that Gen Z individuals accept the coexistence of both motives, which correlate with findings from previous studies in the CSR domain (Ariker & Toksoy, 2017; Ellen et al., 2006; Vázquez et al., 2013).

Gen Z individuals consider different causes/explanations, which help them arrive at the attribution of motives behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Some only assigned negative attribution of motive to brands and retailers, which is in light of discounting principle. In contrast, others attributed both motives, accepting that some brands and retailers could be doing it to benefit themselves and others. Another reason for attributing both motives could also be the lack of detailed information about any specific brand or retailer; therefore, it could be inappropriate for individuals to assign one specific motive to all brands and retailers.

When drawing inferences of a given behaviour, Campbell and Kirmani (2000) state that in the initial stage of drawing inferences, the process happens to be largely perceptual and automatic, whereas the later stage, correction, is more effortful and requires higher-order attributional processing. It is not clear whether individuals moved from the initial to the correction stage. Individuals who attributed both motives strived for the best and most reasonable explanation for the given behaviour. Since not enough information was provided (name of any specific brand/retailer), individuals made their attributions based on the information available.

Mizerski et al. (1979, p.134) explain that 'the attribution process does not have to be conscious' and attributions can be learned and applied from one situation to another

similar one, meaning that people who only attributed the negative motive could be biased in their attribution. However, the study was not designed to explain this bias or assess the attribution process's accuracy. It was designed to identify how Gen Z perceives and evaluates brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and ultimately whether Gen Z is sceptical, which was identified through their attributions of motives.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Factors contributing to the knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives and information credibility

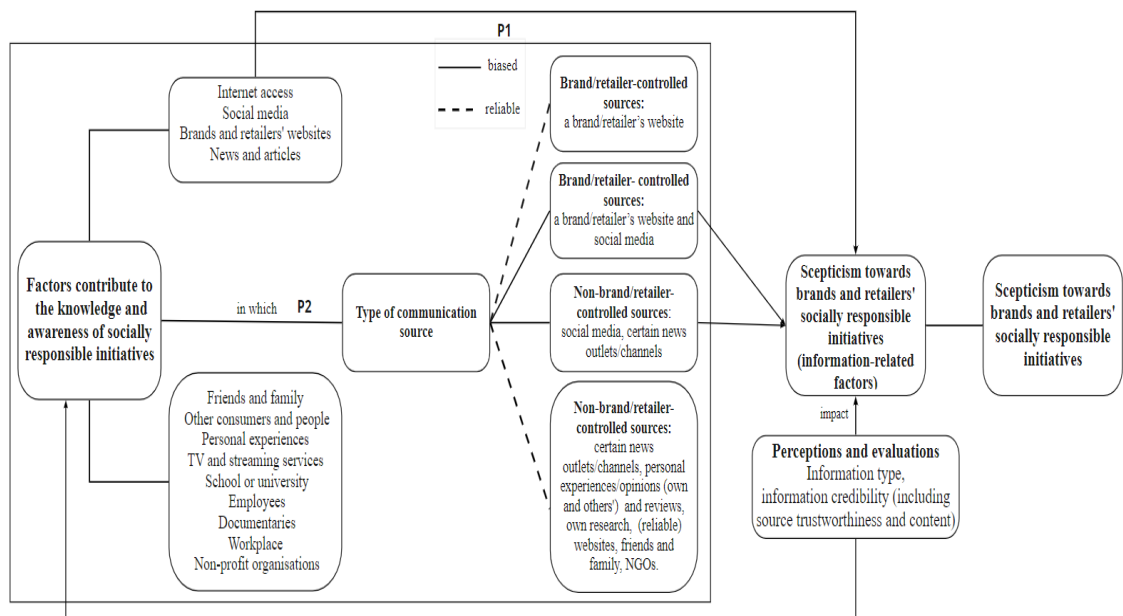
This theme reveals multiple communication and information sources contributing to knowledge and awareness of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The interviewed members of Gen Z are sceptical of some of these sources, indicating scepticism towards information related-factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. This finding supports previous studies demonstrating the impact of knowledge and information sources on consumer scepticism (Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998, 2000; Webb & Mohr, 1998; Xie & Kronrod, 2012; Zarei & Maleki, 2018, cited by Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020Zhang & Hanks, 2017).

It is interesting to note that Gen Z individuals tend to obtain information about the topic via various non-brand/retailer-controlled communication platforms and channels. Some non-brand/retailer-controlled sources were used and mentioned more than the brand/retailer-controlled sources (brands and retailers themselves). Regardless of brand/retailer-controlled and non-brand/retailer-controlled sources, many of the sources used are accessible via the internet. The internet increases knowledge and awareness of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives among Gen Z.

Accessible via the internet, social media is not strictly classified as a brand/retailer-controlled or non-brand/retailer-controlled source. More participants mentioned social media than any other source as platforms to obtain information about brands and retailers' socially responsible actions. The result also shows that participants rely on internet access regarding information. They all acknowledged the ease of internet access and its positive effects on their knowledge and awareness of brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviours. The internet acts as a bridge between Gen Z and information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Gen Z individuals also expressed their concerns over the credibility and reliability of the information on the internet.

After discovering factors contributing to Gen Z individuals' knowledge and awareness, the study investigates how different communication sources relate to scepticism. The findings show that the sources that Gen Z individuals significantly rely on (social media, news and brands and retailers' websites) are the ones with which they have a trust issue regarding information credibility. Regardless of brand/retailer control over the sources (accessible via the internet), Gen Z individuals express scepticism (P1, Figure 5.8). This finding indicates Gen Z's scepticism towards information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives

Figure 5.8 Factors that contribute to the knowledge and the awareness of socially responsible initiatives and scepticism towards information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible practices among Gen Z.



In terms of information credibility from brands and retailers, contradictory opinions were expressed. The result led to the interpretation that a brand/retailer-controlled source potentially leads to scepticism among Gen Z individuals regarding information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

Despite being one of the most common communication platforms where Gen Z individuals obtain information regarding brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, news articles – a non-brand/retailer-controlled source – were not associated with information credibility. Different news outlets and channels were mentioned that were associated with different levels of trust. Overall, as a non-brand/retailer-controlled

source of information, certain news outlets can potentially lead to scepticism towards information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

Other sources, including personal experiences and (what people think of as reliable) websites (including brands and retailers' websites), were mentioned as reliable sources of information. Therefore, these sources are unconnected to scepticism. This finding is in line with previous studies indicating that scepticism varies based on the sources consulted and their credibility (Morel & Pruyn, 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998, 2000; Yoon et al., 2006; Zarei & Maleki, 2018, cited in Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020).

It is evident that scepticism towards the credibility and trustworthiness of information sources exist but vary among individuals. Obermiller and Spangenberg (2000) find non-marketer-controlled sources to be more reliable and credible than marketer-controlled sources among the studied population. Consistently, more non-brand/retailer-controlled sources were perceived to be reliable in this study. However, both brand/retailer-controlled sources and some non-brand/retailer-controlled sources were perceived as unreliable.

Based on the discussions above, both non-brand/retailer-controlled and brand/retailer-controlled sources can potentially lead to scepticism towards information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives due to Gen Z's perceptions and evaluations of these sources (**P2, Figure 5.8**).

According to the data analysed, content can also influence the credibility of the information about brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviour. Notably, the fit between the spokesperson and the content can underpin information credibility. The person who promotes, produces or discusses the content and how information is communicated all impact how Gen Z perceived the credibility of information about brands and retailers' social responsibility. This belief led to the interpretation that the information's content and its elements can potentially lead to scepticism towards information about brands and retailers' socially responsible activities. This result supports findings from previous studies, which indicate that scepticism varies and depends on how messages or claims are executed (Bae, 2020; Joireman et al., 2018; Mohr et al., 1998; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009a; Singh et al., 2009). Regarding the person who promotes, produces or discusses the content, friends and family were mentioned explicitly in an association with information credibility.

There is a mix of opinions on biased and reliable information sources among Gen Z interviewees. The data suggested that the perceptions and evaluations of the information type (brand/retailer-controlled and non-brand/retailer-controlled) and information credibility (including source trustworthiness and information content) used to communicate socially responsible practices could potentially influence scepticism towards information-related factors.

When asked about the credibility of factors contributing to the knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives, most Gen Z individuals expressed their distrust and disbelief towards the information they come across regardless of non-brand/retailer-controlled and brand/retailer-controlled sources. This conclusion illustrates scepticism towards information credibility regardless of the type of information or communication source. The finding of scepticism towards information-related factors relatively supports Rim and Kim's work (2016), indicating that disbelief towards CSR communications and activities and informativeness strongly leads to negative attitudes. Findings in terms of scepticism of information-related factors are relatively consistent with Foreh and Grier (2003), indicating that scepticism can equate to distrust and disbelief towards marketers' claims and motives, and Silva et al. (2020), who note that scepticism represents disbelief towards companies' claims (Brazil context).

5.3.3 Theme 3: Factors influencing trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives

While investigating factors influencing trust, the study uncovers potential factors that lead to scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives among Gen Z individuals.

5.3.3.1 Evidence

Previous studies have demonstrated that sceptical individuals can be persuaded if verifiable evidence and proof are presented (Albayrak et al., 2013; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Huang & Darmayanti, 2014; Morel & Pryun, 2003). Participants from this study require evidence, including tangible impacts, to trust brands and retailers to be socially responsible. This finding reflects scepticism among Gen Z individuals. It is suggested that they would not trust brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives without evidence and impacts of the initiatives. In other words, a lack of evidence and impacts of the initiatives can potentially lead to scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Since Gen Z can be convinced with evidence and impacts of the initiatives, the data also suggests that scepticism is not a permanent state of mind among

Gen Z individuals regarding socially responsible initiatives. Previously, green scepticism was also found to be not a permanent state of mind (Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020).

5.3.3.2 Multiple cues

Gen Z individuals in this study use various information sources to verify and ensure the information they come across is accurate and reliable. This finding supports Singh et al. (2009), indicating that information is more credible if it comes from numerous sources. This sub-theme is also a reflection of the systematic route of information processing as it is more effortful (Palomo et al., 2015; Samson & Voyer, 2012; Spiliopoulos, 2018; Xu, 2017). In the systematic processing route, 'consumers seek, assess, evaluate and integrate all available information before making a judgment' (Palomo et al., 2015, p. 124). In this route, necessary cognitive resources are used to scrutinise available evidence and arguments to make a judgement about a pending decision (Sparks and Pan, 2010). The authors also explain that individuals process information in an effortful and conscious manner in the systematic processing route, where they actively try to assess communication content 'to render a carefully considered evaluative judgment' (p. 407). Further, this result demonstrates a higher level of scepticism among Gen Z individuals: they scrutinise everything related to CSR initiatives (García-Jiménez et al., 2017).

Therefore, Chen et al. (1999, p. 44) state that judgements formed based on systematic processing involve an 'in-depth treatment of judgment-relevant information and are accordingly responsive to the semantic content of this information'. Zhao et al. (2015) add that, in this route, individuals require high-quality information with greater standards before making decisions. Indeed, the participants carefully considered the type and credibility of information. Factors such as the argument (the content of the information, how the information is communicated), the person arguing (who promotes, produces or discusses the content) and the causes of the behaviour (reasons for being socially responsible) are what people consider under the systematic route of the HSM in making a judgement (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012; Todorov et al., 2002).

On the contrary, in the heuristic processing approach, individuals judge with less effort and fewer resources, meaning they accept the information they have or obtain outside without any suspicion (Zhao et al., 2015). Since Gen Z participants disbelieve or distrust information credibility, require evidence and multiple cues to trust brands and retailers as socially responsible, this result shows that Gen Z individuals were involved in a more effortful and more analytic route instead of using simple decision rules (Palomo et al., 2015; Sparks & Yan, 2010) in aiding their judgement task, indicating higher scepticism.

According to García-Jiménez et al. (2017), more sceptical people have a higher level of involvement as they question and scrutinise everything with more elaboration regarding CSR initiatives.

The findings also show that some Gen Z individuals rely on easy to identify heuristic cues. For example, they rely on source expertise (journalist, environmental activists, academic professionals), source attractiveness (photos, videos, visual layout of the website and online channel), audience characteristics (negative versus positive reviews, comments and reactions) and statistical data (number of reviews, comments). These cues are only the surface of the information (communicator characteristic, as in Chen et al., 1999; reactions to the message, as in Chaiken, 1987; statistical data, as in Griffin et al., 2002; source attractiveness, as in Liu & Shrum, 2009). Heuristics are knowledge structures learned and stored in memory, and they serve as mental shortcuts allowing quick judgements to form without much reasoning (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Matching data against the sub-themes in theme 3, individuals who rely on simple heuristic cues also require more than a single factor to decide whether to trust brands and retailers' socially responsible actions and the communication or information about the given behaviour.

Gen Z individuals who followed the heuristic processing also followed systematic processing, attempting to process information in detail. This finding reflects the co-occurrence of two information processing routes of the HSM. The study was not designed to investigate why these processes occur or the condition for these processes to occur. However, based on the data analysed, it can be said that many Gen Z individuals are involved in a systematic processing route (require multiple cues) when it comes to evaluating and judging the reliability and validity of information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The findings show that they are sceptical of the credibility of the information about brands and retailers' level of social responsibility. Therefore, they rely on as many sources as possible, particularly those they view as reliable, to validate the information. According to the data, the heuristic cues were not enough for Gen Z individuals to trust brands and retailers to be socially responsible. Therefore, individuals involved in the systematic route to be confident about their judgement (Xu, 2017).

5.3.3.3 Reputation

The reputation of brands and retailers is a factor that influences Gen Z's trust. It is worth noting that reputation was mentioned in correlation with history and the management teams (indicating multiple cues and systematic processing). This finding in terms of

reputation supports Elving's conclusion (2012), which states that reputation might impact scepticism.

5.3.3.4 Information type and credibility

Previous studies demonstrate the critical role of information sources (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000; Yoon et al., 2006; Zarei & Maleki, 2018, cited by Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020) and the influence of the credibility of information on scepticism (Morel & Pruyn, 2003; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000). The results show that non-brand/retailer-controlled sources (personal experiences, opinions, reviews, own research, trusted media and news, friends and family and non-profit organisations) are regarded as reliable. Consequently, participants are more likely to trust specific information types – particularly, non-brand/retailer-controlled sources are trusted more than brand/retailer-controlled sources.

This result supports previous studies in terms of information sources' role in influencing scepticism (Obermiller & Spanegemberg, 2000; Zarei & Maleki, 2018, cited in Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020). It also supports Rim and Kim's work (2016), showing that scepticism towards informativeness can lead to negative consumer responses. In addition, the data also indicate that information credibility is associated with specific sources of information influences trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Hence, the data suggest that the perceptions and evaluations of information credibility and type can influence scepticism towards information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

5.3.3.5 How brands and retailers present themselves

According to the data, under the sub-theme 'How brands and retailers present themselves' (the argument itself), acknowledging reasons for being socially responsible has proven to influence trust among Gen Z individuals. This conclusion supports findings in Bae's study (2018), De Vries et al.'s study (2015) and Foreh and Grier's study (2003), which indicates that the acknowledgement of the motives behind CSR initiatives influences how consumers perceive, evaluate and attribute motives to firms' CSR activities. It is suggested that brands and retailers might face scepticism from consumers if they fail to provide reasons for practising socially responsible initiatives (the causes of the behaviour). Additionally, the data also reveal that Gen Z individuals evaluate managers to see who is making a statement (the person who argues), who is making the change and what they gain from being socially responsible. These are the factors (the argument itself, the person who argues and the causes of the behaviour) under the systematic route people

use to make a judgement about the given behaviour (Todorov et al., 2002; Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012).

The finding reveals how much detail Gen Z needs to decide whether to trust brands and retailers regarding socially responsible initiatives. It reflects the systematic route of information processing as it is more effortful (Palomo et al., 2015; Spiliopoulos, 2018; Samson & Voyer, 2012; Xu, 2017). The fit between the nature of brands and retailers and the socially responsible initiatives has proven to influence trust among Gen Z individuals. This result resembles Becker-Olsen et al.'s finding (2006) regarding the effect of the fit between a company and its CSR activity.

5.3.3.6 Transparency

Transparency among brands and retailers has proven to be influential regarding trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Therefore, it is suggested that the absence of the transparency of socially responsible initiatives might lead to scepticism.

5.3.3.7 Size and scale

Participants of the study pointed to the size and scale of brands and retailers' socially responsible activities as factors influencing their trust. Specifically, smaller brands and retailers are perceived as more genuine and trustworthy than larger ones regarding socially responsible initiatives. This finding illustrates the influence of the size and scale of brands and retailers' socially responsible activities on trust and scepticism.

5.3.3.8 History of socially responsible behaviour

Regarding the historical length of socially responsible behaviour, it is evident that a shorter length negatively affects trust, while a longer length positively affects trust among the Gen Z members interviewed. This result is consistent with findings in Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017), Schmeltz (2012) and Vanhamme and Grobben (2009), where a long history of CSR involvement resulted in more favourable responses from respondents about motivations behind CSR initiatives. However, the study finding also shows that while the longer length is vital for trust, brands and retailers who have a shorter history of socially responsible behaviour still have the potential to be trusted. It means a short history of being socially responsible does not always lead to distrust or scepticism. This finding is inconsistent with the previous study by Vanhamme and Grobben (2009), which indicates that a short history of CSR involvement triggers scepticism about a company's motivations. The empirical data of this study shows that having a short history does not necessarily mean brands and retailers cannot be trusted. This is because brands and

retailers can start with a purpose or value, such as to be socially responsible and environmentally friendly.

5.3.3.9 Quantity of socially responsible initiatives

Regarding the quantity of socially responsible initiatives, participants would trust brands and retailers that carry out more socially responsible initiatives and would also trust brands and retailers that try to make changes even though they only focus on one aspect of social responsibility. Thus, it is fair to say that a larger number of socially responsible initiatives does not necessarily make them more trustworthy than those trying to make small changes. This finding from the current study somewhat contradicts Elving's finding and assumption (2012), indicating that limited CRM activity might lead to scepticism, assuming that integrated CSR produces positive results. The empirical data of the current study illustrate that the absence of many socially responsible activities does not necessarily lead to scepticism among consumers.

5.3.3.10 Charitable donations

According to participants, charitable donations can influence their trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Matched against the data in the 'multiple cues' sub-theme, it is suggested that the absence of a charitable donation is not a strong driver of scepticism among Gen Z.

5.3.3.11 Matching personal values

The congruence between personal values and brands and retailers' socially responsible practices influenced trust among Gen Z individuals. This finding supports Gupta and Pirsch's work (2006), indicating that customer-company and customer-cause congruence have a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards the sponsoring company. Matching against the data in the 'multiple cues' sub-theme, it is interpreted that the absence of the congruence between personal values and brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives is not a strong driver of scepticism among Gen Z.

5.3.3.12 Pricing

Pricing is a factor influencing trust regarding brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Matched against the data in the 'multiple cues' sub-theme, it is suggested that the absence of high prices is not a strong driver of scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible practices.

5.4 Summary

The chapter presented the findings and interpreted them. The first theme covers Gen Z's perceptions and evaluations of brands and retailers socially responsible initiatives. The

data related to the first theme reveals that Gen Z perceives motives behind brands and retailers' socially responsible practices differently (indicating different scepticism levels).

The second theme reveals scepticism among Gen Z individuals, and their scepticism varies towards different information sources (non-brand/retailer-controlled, brand/retailer-controlled) that contribute to their knowledge and awareness about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The perceptions and evaluations of information type and credibility can impact scepticism towards information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

The final theme contains data about factors influencing Gen Z's trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviours. The findings under the final theme led to a broader discussion about consumers' trust and scepticism. Finally, the chapter provides detailed discussions of each theme and sub-theme, where the findings were reflected in connection to the existing literature.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings of the main study in relation to the relevant secondary literature. This final chapter provides discussions of its theoretical and practical contributions. Limitations and suggestions for future research are also included.

6.2 Summary of the findings

RO1: Investigate whether Gen Z individuals are sceptical of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

The research first investigated how Gen Z individuals perceive socially responsible practices performed by brands, manufacturers and retailers to discover whether they are sceptical towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives (**RQ1, RO1**). The results led to the conclusion that scepticism exists and varies among Gen Z individuals in this study. The findings also demonstrate various causal inferences that explain consumer attribution of the motive behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Overall, more people attributed the motivation of profit-based interest than others' welfare to brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The perceived motives can be summarised as follows:

Causal explanations associated with profit-based interest, including:

- Money/cost-saving, sustainability, brand image and brand reputation, trend, competition, consumers, media pressure and legislative/regulatory pressure.

Causal explanations associated with others' welfare, including:

- Genuine intention, the welfare of the environment, animals and the world.

Different individuals expressed distinct views towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and attributed different motives to brands and retailers' socially responsible practices. The variation in attributed motives reflects the different levels of scepticism among Gen Z individuals. Notably, individuals with a higher level of scepticism perceived brands and retailers' motives negatively, associating brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives with profit-based interest. The data also show the acceptance of the duality of motives for being socially responsible among Gen Z individuals. The findings indicate the influence of scepticism among individuals on perceptions and evaluations of socially responsible initiatives and motives behind those initiatives and subsequently consumer attributions (**Figure 6.1**).

RO2: Explore factors that potentially influence CSR scepticism development among Generation Z in the UK.

This study aims to explore and uncover the variety of factors that potentially contribute to consumer scepticism among Gen Z towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives (**RQ2, RO2**). The investigation of factors influencing trust among Gen Z towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives unveils the potential factors that can influence scepticism accordingly.

Based on the findings drawn from the main study, factors that potentially influence scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives (including scepticism towards information-related factors) among Gen Z individuals in the UK include:

- (1) Individuals' perceptions and evaluations of information credibility (including source trustworthiness and the content of information) of the information sources that contribute to knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives, including all types of communication source (non-brand/retailer-controlled and brand/retailer-controlled).
- (2) Factors/information sources contribute to the knowledge and awareness of socially responsible initiatives due to Gen Z's perceptions and evaluations of these sources.
- (3) Type of communication source (non-brand/retailer-controlled and brand/retailer-controlled) due to Gen Z's perceptions and evaluations of these sources.
- (4) Lack of multiple cues indicating that brands and retailers are socially responsible.
- (5) Lack of evidence, including the impacts of socially responsible initiatives.
- (6) The transparency of socially responsible initiatives.
- (7) Reputation.
- (8) History of socially responsible behaviour.
- (9) The size of brands or retailers and the scale of their socially responsible initiatives.

- (10) How brands and retailers present themselves, including acknowledging reasons for being socially responsible and the fit between the nature of brands and retailers and the socially responsible initiatives and the management teams.

The absence of each of the following factors combined with other factors can potentially lead to scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible actions. Thus, the absence of each of the following factors influencing trust may not trigger scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives:

- A long history of being socially responsible.
- Charitable donations.
- Pricing (high).
- The congruence between personal values and brands or retailers' socially responsible practices.
- The number of socially responsible initiatives carried out.

Based on a summary of the findings, the results for each research question were mapped onto the final frameworks below (**Figure 6.1, Figure 6.2**).

Figure 6.1: Final framework for **RQ1**. Consumer attributions, causal explanations and levels of scepticism.

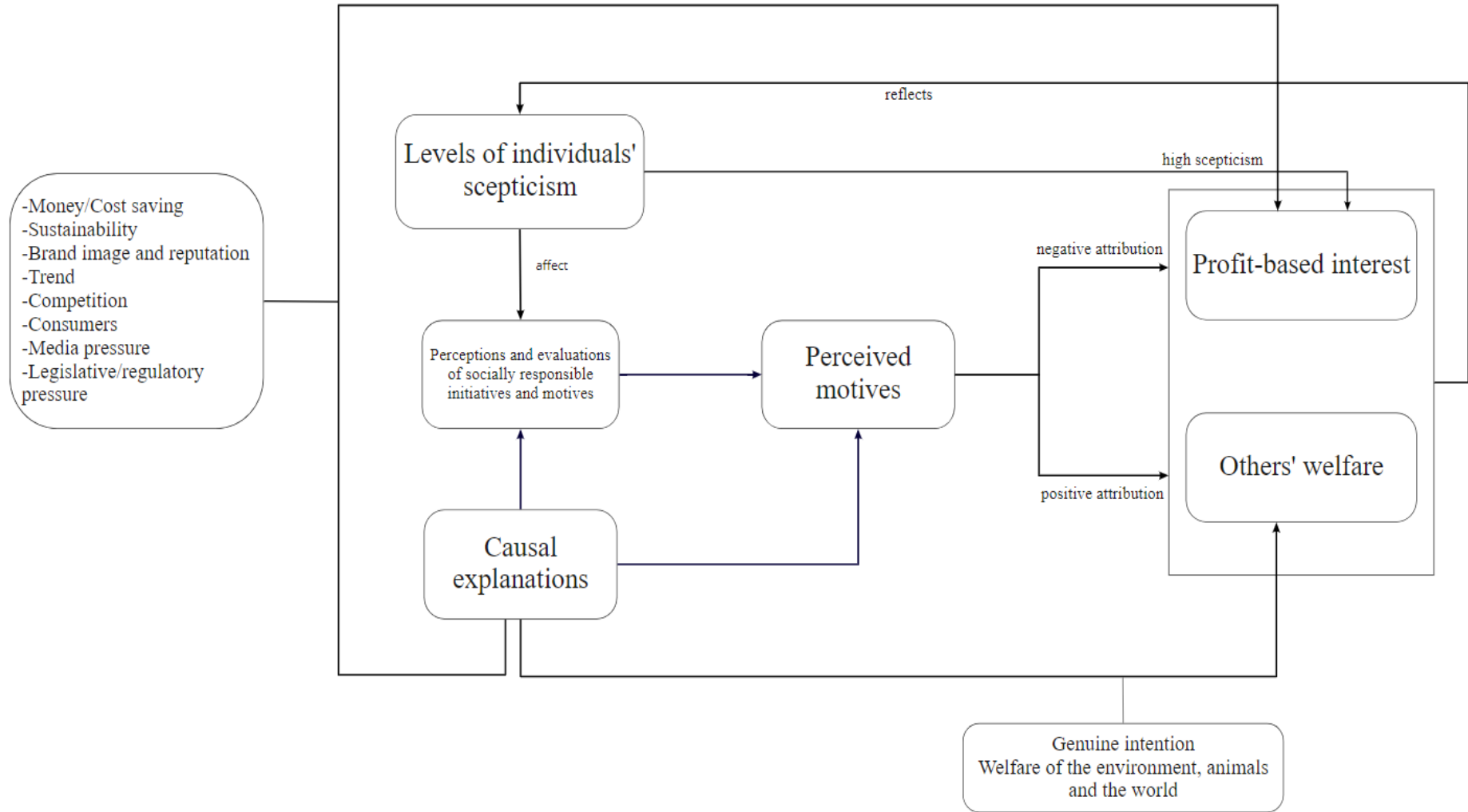


Figure 6.2: Final framework for RQ2. Factors influencing scepticism among Gen Z towards brands and retailers' socially responsible practices.

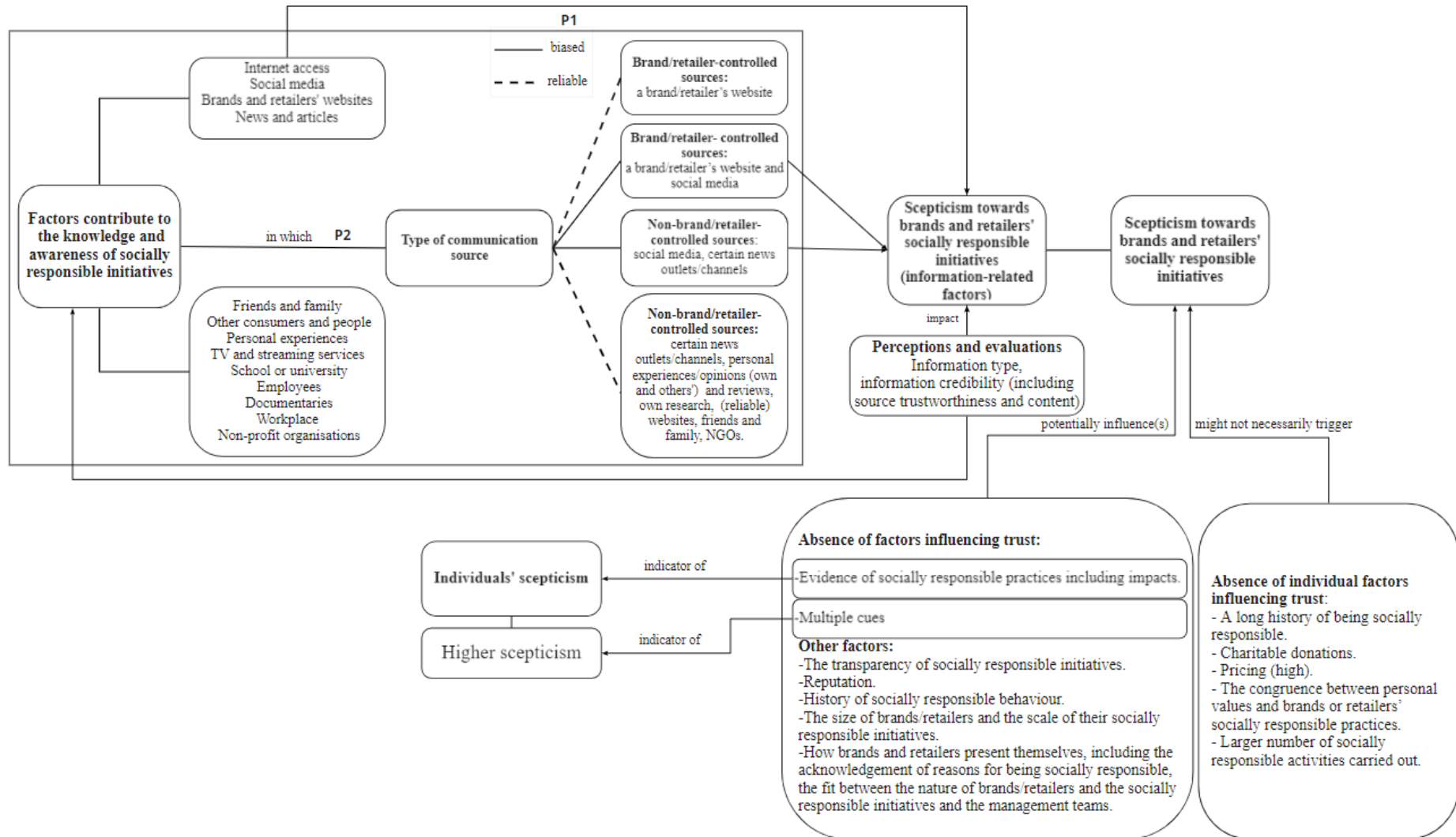


Figure 6.1: The emerging framework provides an understanding of the causal mechanism for consumer attributions. Under the light of discounting principle, the findings show that when individuals choose one cause (profit-based interest), they discount the possibility of another cause (others' welfare). In contrast, some choose to assign both motives as they see more than one plausible explanation for socially responsible behaviour among brands and retailers. Overall, they think brands and retailers behave in socially responsible ways because they genuinely care and also because of trends and competition, to name just a few.

Figure 6.2: Gen Z members are sceptical of some sources contributing to their knowledge and awareness about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives (**P1, P2**). In contrast, the findings show that Gen Z was not sceptical of some non-brand/retailer-controlled sources. As a result, the perceptions and evaluations of information credibility (including source trustworthiness and the content of information) of information sources (non-brand/retailer-controlled, brand/retailer-controlled) that contribute to knowledge and awareness about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives can have an impact on scepticism towards the information-related factors about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Scepticism towards information-related factors regarding brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives is part of the overall scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The need to (a) see evidence to create trust is an indicator of scepticism among Gen Z members, and (b) the requirement of multiple cues to validate the information is an indicator of higher scepticism. Various factors and the absence of some factors influencing trust can potentially influence scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The absence of some individual factors influencing trust might not trigger scepticism.

6.3 Contributions

6.3.1 Theoretical contributions

The study contributes to the CSR scepticism literature in many ways. First, this study is the first to investigate consumer scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives among Gen Z individuals in the UK context, as little is known about this generation in the marketing field, especially their scepticism towards CSR. Second, this study takes the first steps to enhance understanding of consumer scepticism towards an overlooked area of CSR initiatives: most previous studies have heavily focused on CRM, a dimension of CSR.

Third, the current study contributes to the CSR scepticism literature by answering the calls in prior studies regarding the additional drivers of scepticism in the CSR context (Ellen et al., 2006; Elving, 2012; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Mantovani et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2009; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Zhang & Hanks, 2017). Thus, the study advances the current CSR scepticism literature by providing evidence on potential factors influencing Gen Z's scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Specifically, this study shows that the absence of evidence, multiple cues that indicate that brands and retailers are socially responsible, and the transparency of socially responsible initiatives can potentially influence scepticism among Gen Z individuals.

Additional factors potentially influencing scepticism include reputation, the history of socially responsible behaviour, the size of brand or retailer and the scale of their socially responsible initiatives, how brands and retailers present themselves (including the acknowledgement of reasons for socially responsible actions, the fit between the nature of brands and retailers and their socially responsible initiatives and the management teams). Perceptions and evaluations of the information-related factors regarding socially responsible initiatives (information type: brand/retailer-controlled, non-brand/retailer-controlled; information credibility: source trustworthiness, information content) can impact scepticism towards information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. The study also found some potential but weak drivers of scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives. Contradicting past research in the CSR scepticism literature, current study results show that the absence of a long history of CSR involvement and less socially responsible activities carried out might not lead to CSR scepticism.

Fourth, the current study extends the CSR scepticism literature by providing empirical evidence on different levels of scepticism and its influence on consumer behavioural responses and evaluations. Specifically, consistent with Foreh and Grier's work (2003) in the corporate societal marketing context (a dimension of CSR), the current study found that consumer attributions of motives (profit-based interest, others' welfare) reflect different levels of scepticism (high versus low) towards socially responsible initiatives, a different dimension of CSR which, in turn, influences consumer perceptions and evaluations of socially responsible initiatives and the motives behind those initiatives. Thus, the finding extends the CSR scepticism literature by providing evidence that different levels of scepticism exist among consumers beyond the CRM and advertising contexts.

Different levels of scepticism have also been demonstrated through the empirical data regarding how Gen Z individuals require different cues corresponding to distinct information processing routes (reflecting different levels of scepticism) to trust brands and retailers' socially responsible actions. Regardless of context (CSR, green advertising, new product), previous studies have demonstrated that sceptical people can be persuaded with verifiable evidence and proof (Albayrak et al., 2013; García-Jiménez et al., 2017; Huang & Darmayanti, 2014; Morel & Pryun, 2003). The current study not only provides evidence to support this finding but also extends the current literature regarding context (socially responsible practices).

The study also suggests that scepticism is not a permanent state of mind. This result supports and extends previous research in other contexts, such as green scepticism and corporate societal marketing (Albayrak et al., 2013; Fabiola & Mayangsari, 2020; Foreh & Grier, 2003; Goh & Balaji, 2016). In addition, in the current study, scepticism is associated with disbelief towards information-related factors, which goes beyond the current literature on corporate societal marketing (Foreh & Grier, 2003) and green scepticism (Silva et al., 2020).

Fifth, the present study contributes and extends prior research on the complexity of consumer attributions (Chen & Chiu, 2018; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2014) and consumers' information processing (Joireman et al., 2018; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009a; Rim & Kim, 2016; Yoon et al., 2006; Zhang & Hanks, 2017) when making judgements or evaluating CSR initiatives and motives. Unlike past studies, the current study investigates how individuals arrive at the attributions of CSR motives. This study's findings of causal explanations echo Leonidou and Skarmeas's work (2017) and Marin et al.'s work (2015) regarding multiple components of CSR attributions among consumers. However, the present study provides evidence of the underlying mechanism of consumer attributions (causal explanations) in a different context (socially responsible initiatives). Additionally, motive(s) attributed based on the plausible perceived cause(s) reflect the levels of individuals' scepticism, which in turn influences the perceptions and evaluations of motives behind brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

The study extends the current literature by directing the investigation to the attributional process as a theoretical mechanism to understand scepticism based on the perceptions and evaluations of motives. Past studies only investigate the relationship between consumer attributions and scepticism (Chen & Chiu, 2018; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Skarmeas

et al., 2014), not how respondents arrive at the attributions. The data from this study shows that levels of scepticism among individuals led to different attributions of the motive behind socially responsible initiatives. Thus, the study enhances our knowledge of the influence of individuals' scepticism on consumer behavioural responses in an overlooked area of CSR beyond advertising and CRM. The emerging framework (**Figure 6.1**) offers a more holistic and deeper understanding of the consumer attributional process in the CSR scepticism literature. In other words, this study contributes to theory building in the CSR scepticism domain by advancing our knowledge of consumers' attributional process when assigning motive(s) behind CSR initiatives.

When applying the discounting principle to corporate societal marketing phenomena (another dimension of CSR activities, see Abitbol et al., 2018; Kotler & Lee, 2005), Foreh and Grier (2003) assume that either a firm-serving or public-serving motive will apply but not both. Similarly, Leake (1992) states that most work in AT adopts the view that either personal or situational factors will apply. The research findings show that both motives can apply when evaluating the motivations behind brands and retailers' socially responsible practices. This finding is in line with previous work in the CSR context by Ariker and Toksoy (2017), Ellen et al. (2006) and Vázquez et al. (2013), which accepts that consumers can assign multiple motives to a given behaviour. Thus, the current study extends the extant consumer scepticism literature by demonstrating that both motives can apply, signifying the limitations of AT and the discounting principle in understanding consumer attribution in the CSR scepticism context. In addition, the findings provide novel conceptual material (comprehensive causal explanations beyond the traditional approach of personal/internal and environmental/external causes), contributing to further theory building and research in the CSR scepticism domain.

By investigating the factors influencing trust, the study reveals the potential factors influencing consumer scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, offering conceptual contributions to the CSR scepticism domain. Investigating factors influencing trust also leads to an understanding of consumer information processing that corresponds to different levels of scepticism. The findings show that people are unequally sceptical and consider different information cues (heuristic and systematic) to judge the credibility of information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and the trustworthiness of socially responsible initiatives.

Sixth, the current study advances the CSR scepticism literature regarding the source and impact of knowledge on scepticism in the context of socially responsible initiatives.

Previously, knowledge has been demonstrated to impact consumer scepticism in different contexts (CSR- Zhang & Hanks, 2017; CRM- Brønn & Vrioni, 2000, 2001; Webb & Mohr, 1998; advertising- Silva et al., 2020; Xie & Kronrod, 2012) and to affect the consumer cognitive mechanisms in processing green advertising (Schmuck et al., 2018). By investigating factors contributing to the knowledge and awareness of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, this study shows that scepticism is associated with disbelief towards information-related factors about socially responsible initiatives. Thus, the research conceptually extends the literature by providing empirical data for the source and impact of knowledge/information on CSR scepticism.

Seventh, the credibility of information was found to influence scepticism in the advertising context (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998, 2000) and serves as a significant source of product scepticism (Morel & Pruyn, 2003). The data from the current study indicate that the credibility of information can also influence scepticism in the context of social responsibility, which extends the current consumer scepticism literature.

Moreover, the acknowledgement of reasons for behaving in socially responsible ways was found to potentially influence scepticism, which supports the previous work in other contexts (CRM-Bae, 2018; environment - De Vries et al., 2015, corporate societal marketing - Foreh & Grier, 2003;). However, the current study goes beyond these contexts to extend the current CSR scepticism literature.

In addition, the current study also extends the current CSR scepticism literature by responding to Mantovani et al.'s (2017) suggestion about investigating the role of the size (of firms) on consumers' perceptions of the motivations behind CSR actions. The empirical data has demonstrated that the size of the brand or retailer and the scale of socially responsible activities can influence consumer scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

Eighth, this is the first qualitative research-based study to investigate scepticism towards social responsibility among Gen Z in the UK context. As noted previously, most quantitative studies in the past have emphasised the US context. By focusing on the UK context, the study addresses this gap and extends the current consumer scepticism literature. A qualitative study allowed for the discovery of the cognitive process individuals went through when evaluating brands and retailers' motives for socially responsible behaviour and facilitated an in-depth investigation of the potential factors that

influence Gen Z individuals' scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

Finally, the study contributes to the consumer scepticism literature by documenting the effect of consumer scepticism towards CSR, CRM (a dimension of CSR) and advertising.

6.3.2 Implications for marketing practice

Beyond the theoretical contributions, the current study also offers practical implications. First, it employed a diverse sample of Gen Z consumers, allowing for a holistic view of Gen Z consumers' scepticism in the UK. The results of this study offer some valuable contributions to the business management and marketing fields.

Today, brands and retailers have many online platforms available to effectively and efficiently communicate with their customers. However, the empirical data show that Gen Z's scepticism is connected to many sources that are available and accessible via the internet. Gen Z's scepticism can be traced back to the surrounding environment, where the internet allows information to spread regardless of credibility. Gen Z is the first generation to be born into a digitally connected world (as discussed in chapter 3). They rely on the internet for information, are aware of the various platforms available and assess the credibility of information coming from those platforms. The results of the current study shed light on the consumer scepticism associated with the ease of information technology. In the information age, where fake news continues to emerge, scepticism towards information about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives might be a rational response. Hence, consumer scepticism is arguably the best defence mechanism against misleading information.

For marketing implications, it is essential to note that Gen Z individuals do not perceive CSR efforts and CSR communications uniformly. Brands and marketers need to accept that Gen Z consumers can be sceptical of brands and retailers' communications about socially responsible activities and motivation(s) for engaging in socially responsible practices. When it comes to judging the motivation(s) behind brands and retailers' socially responsible practices, Gen Z consumers are more likely to think negatively. Brands and retailers can change consumers' perceived motives and have consumers think positively about the reasons for brands and retailers to engage in socially responsible behaviours. It is recommended that brands and retailers consider several aspects when communicating their social responsibilities to achieve the desired behavioural responses from Gen Z individuals.

Gen Z is conscious of the credibility of information coming from certain platforms such as social media or brands and retailers' websites; thus, it is suggested that having additional supporting information or links is vital to gain trust. Social media platforms can be used to clarify, engage with stakeholders and perhaps address scepticism (Moscato & Hopp, 2019). The content and context of the information should be carefully evaluated to avoid individuals feeling manipulated or overwhelmed. In order to avoid scepticism, campaigns and communications need more attention in terms of the credibility of content and the platforms or channels used to distribute and promote socially responsible initiatives. The findings perhaps explain why brands and retailers face such difficulties in communicating their good deeds. The study results also offer valuable insights into which platforms brands and retailers can use to design their communications of socially responsible initiatives to communicate with future consumers.

Scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviour can be countered using several tactics. For example, a well-justified campaign acknowledging the reasons for being socially responsible may be perceived with less scepticism. Moscato and Hopp (2019) highlight this finding in their research, suggesting that companies should prepare themselves to explain how and why CSR activities or campaigns are delivered to counter CSR scepticism. Providing evidence of the progress and impacts of the initiatives and showing the transparency of socially responsible initiatives could help enhance the image of being truthful and genuine. Gen Z consumers based their decisions on various factors when evaluating whether to trust that brands and retailers are socially responsible for the right reason(s). Therefore, providing those factors is crucial to gain trust towards socially responsible actions. The findings help set the reality for brands and retailers who want their CSR actions and communications to be perceived positively. Therefore, CSR scepticism inspires brands and retailers to direct their attention towards engaging in openness, honesty and transparency regarding their ethical and sustainable practices. It also encourages brands and retailers to actively prepare to engage in sustainable practices for the preservation of natural resources, the betterment of society and the opportunity to provide socially conscious consumers, Gen Z, sustainable buying options.

Gen Z is still young and is not brand-loyal (Mohamed, 2018), posing a challenge for customer retention. Realistically, they can be supportive one day, but if they find out these CSR activities are unsustainable or unethical, they could turn their back on these brands and retailers. It is not difficult for information to spread in this connected world. As Moscato and Hopp (2019) indicate, scepticism can turn into a more significant issue when

companies are accused of greenwashing. Consequently, understanding the young consumers will allow marketers to strategically and carefully draw a socially responsible behaviour roadmap, learning how to positively attract consumer attention. Thus, scepticism is not solely problematic. Instead, it can encourage brands and retailers to consider how they operate and communicate with stakeholders. CSR scepticism is beneficial when brands and retailers use insights into the drivers of CSR scepticism to their advantage to differentiate themselves from competitors.

Sustainability will become compulsory in the near future, and there will be punishments for businesses that lack sustainable practices (Berdak & Deya, 2020). Sustainable packaging has become one of the most important aspects brands, manufacturers and retailers take into consideration as part of business operations (Trotter, 2019). The study findings reveal a negative perception regarding plastic packaging recycling among brands and retailers, encouraging brands, manufacturers and retailers to invest in sustainable packaging options. As policymakers, governing bodies can play a vital role in making the necessary changes to help the following groups:

Consumers:

- Change opinion and perceptions on why they should be more environmentally friendly and sustainable with their choices and shopping by raising awareness on how it can be done with minimal impacts on day-to-day life (benefits of switching from single-use to reusable plastic) and stressing long-term benefits (health and climate change).
- Help them to manage this change with a low impact on their household budgets.

Brands, manufacturers and retailers:

- Assist in transitioning their operations to decrease the impact on the environment and society (perhaps through grants, expert information and research and development).
- Raise awareness of low-cost methods for environmentally friendly actions (alternative recycling options).
- Lower fees or concessions (waste disposal or taxes) for businesses that actively recycle and invest in decreasing their carbon footprint.
- Actively monitor and assess compliance with recycling rules and regulations.

6.3.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite having significant contributions both theoretically and practically, the study has several limitations. First, the scope of this study is limited to the UK. Future research could investigate consumer scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible practices among Gen Z in a different setting, such as in Asia. As of the time of writing, only limited research has investigated CSR scepticism among Asian countries, specifically in relation to Generation Z. In particular, Goh and Balaji's work (2016) discusses consumer scepticism in Malaysia, Chen and Chiu (2018) investigate consumer scepticism in Taiwan and Fabiola and Mayangsari's work (2020) focuses on consumer scepticism in Indonesia. People from different cultures have distinctive cognitive styles, resulting in differences in judgement and decision-making (Ji & Yap, 2016). Future research could investigate this phenomenon in an Asian country, as beliefs and understandings of CSR in emerging markets like China and India are different from that of Western nations (Munro, 2013). The results could be compared to how Gen Z consumers in an Asian country perceive brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives and how they judge brands and retailers' motives and decide whether to trust brands and retailers with their socially responsible actions, claims and messages.

Second, due to the study's exploratory nature, a strong emphasis has been placed on gaining insights and understanding into consumer scepticism among Gen Z members in the UK. However, this approach limits the generalisation of the result. Future research could use a bigger sample and a quantitative method to test the results of this study in terms of drivers of scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives to improve generalisability.

Finally, the study did not analyse consumer perceptions and evaluations of any particular brand or retailer's socially responsible initiatives. This decision might affect consumer attribution. Future research could investigate specific brands, manufacturers or retailers to gain insight into the specific perceived motive behind their sustainability-related initiatives.

6.4 Conclusions

In conclusion, this research offers an in-depth understanding of consumer scepticism towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives among Gen Z in the UK. In doing so, it offers insights into the process of consumer attributions of motives regarding the matter. It explains and addresses the challenges faced by brands and retailers when implementing and promoting their socially responsible initiatives. The study also offers

an understanding of Gen Z's perceptions and evaluations of information about brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviour and the effects on scepticism towards communications about brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives.

More importantly, through the discovery of factors that may potentially influence scepticism among Gen Z in the UK towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives, the study makes a significant contribution to the CSR scepticism literature. Notably, it addresses the dearth of research about this young consumer group and reveals the drivers of consumer scepticism towards an overlooked dimension of CSR. Potential directions are offered for further research, which aims at assisting brands and retailers in further understanding consumer perceptions, evaluations and behaviours to strategically design effective CSR campaigns and communications.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Generation Z's birth year

Birth year	Known as	References
Between the second half of the 1990s and 2010	Digital natives, Digital integrators, Zeds, Zees, Bubble-wrap kids, The new millennials, Screenagers, iGen, Generation M, Generation C – Connected Generation, Teens, Tweens, Click'n go kids	Budac (2015)
From 1997 onward	iGeneration, Plurals, Generation Next, screen addicts, screenagers	Duffett (2017)
After 2000	Post-Millennials, Net Generation, Generation Z	Cruz et al. (2017)
1996–2013	Digital natives	Grow and Yang (2018)
Between 1995 and around 2002	Photograph generation	Haddouche and Salomone (2018)
Between the early 1990s and the early 2000s	Generation Net, the 21st Century generation	Kapil and Roy (2014)
From 1995 to the early 2010s	Post-Millennials, iGeneration	Kapusy and Lógó (2017)
Early 1900s and mid-2000s (academia) 1996–2011 (marketers)	Anti-Millennials, digital native, mobile native	Lanier (2017)
During the middle 1990s and late 2000s	Generation I, The Internet Generation, Generation Next, Net Generation, iGeneration	Levickaite (2010)
Between 1995 and 2005	Digital natives	Malison (2015)
Around the mid-90s	Gen Z	Mohammed (2018)
	Generation Z	Noor et al. (2017)
After 2000	Mobile generation, Internet Generation, first mobile mavens	Özkan and Solmaz (2015a,b)
1995 or later		Priporas et al. (2017)
1997–2000	Post-millennials	Southgate (2017)
2000 and 2025	Digital natives	Thomas and Srinivasan (2016)
Early 1990s to the mid-2000s	Digital natives	Williams (2015b)
Mid-1990s–early 2000s	Generation Z	Wood (2013)

Appendix B. Interview questions and prompts

1. How would you consider the current behaviour of brands, manufacturers and retailers in terms of social responsibility? (Elaborate that socially responsible activities can be anything from plastic recycling, the welfare of people, animals and the environment. The focus is on plastic packaging)
2. What sources, if any, do you use to obtain information about brands, manufacturers and retailers' socially responsible practices? (Probe whether this is based on a single information source or multiple sources. Reason(s) for using single or multiple sources)
3. What are your most trusted communication platform(s)/channel(s) when it comes to information about socially responsible practices? (Probe on reason(s) for trust)
 - 3.1 What are your least trusted communication platform(s)/channel(s) when it comes to information about socially responsible practices? (Probe on reason(s) for distrust)
4. On what basis do you decide whether to trust a brand, manufacturer or retailer's socially responsible activities? (Additional prompt: What else do you take into consideration in order to decide if a brand or a retailer is trustworthy in terms of social responsibility?; Elaborate whether the participants go through a certain process in order to decide if a brand or a retailer is trustworthy in terms of being socially responsible? Reason(s) for such processes)
5. How would you respond to brands and retailers who claim to be socially responsible? (Probe to understand how people would respond to brands and retailers who claim to be responsible in terms of plastic packaging recycling? Reason(s))
 - 5.1 Please explain your reasons.
6. How would you describe the current state of plastic packaging recycling among brands, manufacturers and retailers? (Additionally, what are their perceptions of the genuineness of socially responsible behaviours? Reasons for them to think so.)
7. Have you ever considered any reason for brands and retailers to behave in more socially responsible ways? (Elaborate whether they have ever considered any other reasons for brands, manufacturers and retailers to behave more responsibly in terms of plastic packaging recycling)
 - 7.1 Please explain the reasons.

8. How does internet access affect the way you access and obtain information about socially responsible behaviours among brands and retailers? (Ask about the internet access effect on awareness and knowledge about responsible behaviours among brands, manufacturers and retailers)

9. What factors contribute to your awareness and knowledge about brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviours? (Elaborate to understand how people judge the credibility of those factors)

10. Please name factors that influence your trust in a brand, manufacturer or retailer who claims to be socially responsible towards the environment and society?

Additional prompts:

Discuss the history of being socially responsible and its influence on trust towards the regarded matter. For example, brand A has been socially responsible for years, and brand B has just started practising socially responsible activities; what do you think of them? Would you trust either? Why?

Understand the influence of reputation on the regarded matter. Brands, manufacturers or retailers can be seen as being ethical, unethical, sustainable or unsustainable. Have you ever considered something that influences your trust towards brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives? Why?

Evaluate the effect of quantity of activities on trust. Socially responsible activities can be anything from plastic packaging recycling to carbon emissions or fair-trade. If a brand or a retailer focuses on one aspect versus a brand that works on more than one aspect in terms of being socially responsible, would you trust any of them above others? Why?

Appendix C. Demographic profile

1. Age

18–21

22–25

2. Gender

M

F

Prefer not to say

3. Location (city)

4. Level of education and training

-School/ further education (college/sixth form)

-Higher education (e.g. university degrees: undergraduate degree, postgraduate degree)

-Professional qualifications

-Technical/craft qualifications

-Other (e.g. short course, training)

Appendix D. Examples of spontaneous follow-up questions and those pre-planned from the pilot study

On what basis do you decide whether to trust a brand or a retailer’s socially responsible activities? [main question]

#P001: ‘I go on the websites to see if they have any campaign and what are the results? So, I look for evidence. After that, I would go to their store to see it for myself – for example, to see if they are actually using a paper bag. Say... Lush. Everyone says that they are environmentally friendly, so I went to check it out myself’.

So, you are saying evidence? [spontaneous follow-up question]

#P001: ‘Yes, evidence like numbers, statistics, and of course my personal experience if I can see or try it out myself to be able to trust’.

What about brands where you cannot go to their stores because they do not have one? [spontaneous follow-up question]

#P001: ‘For me, it is not a big deal. I do not need to buy from them. If the quality is really good and everyone keeps saying it is good, then I will give it a try. If it is not what they say, then that is it for me. That is a goodbye for me’.

.....

On what basis do you decide whether to trust a brand or a retailer’s socially responsible activities? [main question]

#P002: ‘Good question. I base [it] on the impact of the products or the services on people and society. The impact could be visible – we can see it – like they do environmentally friendly products that can be recyclable or they don’t test on animals. Or it could be something mentally responsible like having the campaign to raise awareness of being socially responsible, encouraging people to do things that are good for the environment and society. Brands can say things and do nothing – it does not make sense. So, I base my decision on their actions and evidence’.

Are there any other things? [pre-planned follow-up question]

#P002: ‘If someone tells me, for example, people like social and environmental activists. I do not believe in superstars or celebrities or influencers – they only say things that people want them to say. I do not really trust them. Or professionals who are experts in the field and have done many pieces of research about the brand – I would believe them’.

.....
On what basis do you decide whether to trust a brand or a retailer's socially responsible activities? [main question]

#P003: 'I think I will decide based on their actions. I remember when I went to Switzerland, and I had my old Tesco bag with me, and the shop in Switzerland actually offered to exchange a new bag for me even [though] it is not their bag. That is really nice of them. That was what I could see for myself. It is nice to see people do things they promise they do'.

What else do you take into consideration? [pre-planned follow-up question]

#P003: 'Experiences, I guess. If I don't see it for myself and other people or my friends who have been there and who have experienced shopping with the brand'.

Another significant change was the way some of the questions were asked. After the modification was made, the questions were less leading. This shift allowed participants to freely discuss factors that contributed to their awareness and knowledge as well as factors that influenced their trust towards socially responsible initiatives. Some examples reflect this change:

What factors contribute to your awareness and knowledge about brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviours? [Question 9]

#P003: 'Social media, the internet, activists, people around me, experience'.

You said social media. Can it be anything, any platform?

#P003: 'It contributes and informs me. You cannot trust everything on the internet'.

What other factors can you think of? You said people around you – what do you mean by that?

#P003: 'Friends. ... friends help inform me. They tell me what they know'.

.....
Please identify factors that influence your trust in a brand or a retailer who claims to be responsible towards the environment and society? [Question 10]

#P001: 'Evidence, personal experience, non-profit originations, online reviews'.

Is there anything else that influences your trust?

#P001: 'Welfare and also newspapers. I mean reliable newspapers'.

How would you rate reliable newspapers?

#P001: 'The ones like the Guardian, the Evening [Standard], Metro. They talk about everything from economic matters to politics, so it is like they have different perspectives – not just focusing on superstars and gossips. They are the ones that have an established system, so at least I can trust them a little. So newspapers play a role in influencing my trust'.

.....

Please identify factors that influence your trust in a brand or a retailer who claims to be responsible towards the environment and society? [Question 10]

#P003: 'Their actions. Because claiming to be responsible for the environment and society and actually doing it is not clear. The boundaries are not clear. It is not like right nor wrong; yes or no. So, if I can see their actions, I can decide I can trust them'.

OK, let me give you this example: if this brand or retailer has a long history of being responsible and another one just started doing this now, what do you think of those two brands?

#P003: 'If I have to choose one, I will choose the one with a long history to trust. But for me having a history is not the main factor to decide because, you know, the other one has also started. Why not give them a chance? Maybe they can do something even better than the other one'.

Appendix E. Consent form



Version Number 001

Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Consumer scepticism toward Corporate social responsibility: the case of Generation Z in the UK.

Name of Researcher: Nga Nguyen

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet datedfor the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty .
3. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor.
4. I agree that my non-identifiable research data may be stored in National Archives and be used anonymously by others for future research. I am assured that the confidentiality of my data will be upheld through the removal of any personal identifiers.
5. I understand that my interview may be taped and subsequently transcribed.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent
(if different from researcher)

Date

Signature

Nga Nguyen
Researcher

Date

Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher;

Remember that a signed consent form is not required for an anonymous questionnaire, instead the following statement is recommended to be included on the survey questionnaire:

'Completion of this questionnaire is deemed to be your consent to take part in this research.'

Appendix F. A sample interview transcript (main study)

1. How do you think brands, manufacturers and retailers are currently behaving in terms of being socially responsible?

Well, in terms of plastic packaging itself, I can see these brands like McDonald's moving away from the whole plastic thing. Obviously, it is really good to see that – plastic causes so much damage to the environment. Moving away is encouraged, but at the same time, the whole paper straw or paper packaging – things just get ripped easily. I get things delivered, and my dog can easily be able to tear apart the box. So, I mean, it is a start. But in terms of the final result, I think we have to probably still kind of seek alternative materials.

In terms of other socially responsible aspects, for example, workers abroad. I think Primark came under fire for the way they treated their workers in India and Sri Lanka and stuff. As a family, we kind of stopped shopping there. They were paid like £1 for a day's worth of work. It is just our reactions to that – moving away from these employers. Hopefully, that would help, but again, it is not big enough of a change. Primark is still doing its thing. Prices are still low.

2. What sources, if any, do you use to obtain information about brands, manufacturers and retailers' socially responsible practices?

Typically, if I ever need to find out things, I just google it. I never use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. I feel like information gets manipulated so easily. And when people make comments on social media, it is so biased. It is so hard to get information, so always to take that with a pinch of salt, and I never trust it. Yeah, so typically, I go with Google to see the articles – pages are like proper. Stay away from *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*.

Would you go a single information source or multiple?

If I am interested in the topic, I would probably search for it. Google search it. Make sure it is something I typically use and look at a couple like two to three [sites] just to get different viewpoints, get a full picture.

3. What are your most trusted communication platform(s)/channel(s) when it comes to information about socially responsible practices?

Well, typically, when a big scandal comes out, it is on BBC news. And all of those big news outlets, I would trust them. But generally, I am quite sceptical, especially after this

whole coronavirus thing. You see so much on the internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram. You see so many lies. It has taken my trust away just a bit more.

What kind of elements increases your trust?

Reputation. I mean, as I mentioned earlier about the tabloids. You see them coming under fire for their rubbish and nonsense, with BBC – that is verified. I trust their verified information.

3.1 What are your least trusted communication platform(s)/channel(s) when it comes to information about socially responsible practices?

Twitter: very, very biased. Someone can just read a piece of information on the internet, and they will put it in their own words in a way that would either manipulate it as worse or manipulate it as better than it is. And I think [that is] just the way people write it – always puts in people’s minds. And Twitter is very personal, so always people know what you are thinking. And it spreads so quickly. It is a bit dangerous.

Just tabloid *The Guardian*. Especially if something is written from a left-wing or right-wing perspective, they try to manipulate information.

4. On what basis do you decide whether to trust a brand or a retailer’s socially responsible activities?

If you can show me some statistics that are backed up by external sources. I cannot trust your words because obviously everyone wants to keep their costs as low as possible. If you are saying you use this much plastic, do you have that record in your statement? Obviously, can you show me? And partly reputation as well. For example, oh this is our products made out of this – we do not use international labour, stuff like that. And it comes out to be a lie in a few years. Then that is your reputation. Then I would not trust you as much as I might have if you did not lie.

What else do you take into consideration in order to decide if a brand or a retailer is trustworthy in terms of being socially responsible?

I guess the opinions of the workers. If I do have the time and resources, a few workers from different levels can reveal the overall satisfaction. Any dodgy activity? Are they comfortable?

I mean, if you can show me proof. And you have no bad or negative press coming out that I should be worried about and people are happy, and I guess maybe also a quick

snapshot of working conditions, materials they use, machinery, factory, stuff like that, the mission of plastic waste, stuff like that. I would trust you after all of that. The most important thing is the proof for me. If I see it backed up by actual proof, then yeah.

5. How would you respond to brands and retailers who claim to be socially responsible?

I have a good image of you in my mind. I mean, I would be more willing to try out their products. I would be more than happy to spend money at companies I know are socially responsible. Their emissions are kept down. Animals are not hurt in the process. People involved in making that product are being taken care of. So yeah, in that case, I would prefer to buy from them over a company that does not do it or had a bad reputation.

How would you respond to brands and retailers who claim to be responsible in terms of plastic packaging recycling?

Depends on the products. I would try it out to see if that is the case.

So, if they make a claim, would you support them straight away?

Everyone knows these big brands have many workers abroad. Lots of emissions made all of that. So, I think by just saying, 'we are socially responsible', it is really hard to go, 'yeah, now I am going to buy your products' because it is not enough. But some brands make a point of making a donation of a million pounds to this organisation or this charity – that type of hard proof. I am more willing to accept it a bit more.

6. How would you describe the current state of plastic packaging recycling among brands and retailers?

It is getting better, but it is still not what we want. I think our generation, we try to avoid using plastic as much as possible. So, I mean, there is a shift in the right direction, but we are not at the destination yet.

What changes have you seen of this shift towards the right direction?

Some packaging no longer comes in [the] plastic bags they used to come [in]. I think Amazon is trying this whole grocery thing now. They come in really big paper bags – things like that.

Do you think they are genuine?

I don't know. I mean, probably not. Obviously, using plastic is the best way cost-wise for them. So, in terms of the person who owns the business, they are trying to keep their costs low – as low as possible. But at the same time, they might just do so to get good media or be out of this perception of not doing anything. It might be a show.

7. Have you ever considered any reason for brands and retailers to behave with more social responsibility?

I mean, I guess if they specifically care. I see Bill Gates doing a lot of pharma care. There is a lot of controversy around it – whether he is doing it for money to increase profit for his pharmaceutical products or whether he is doing it because he genuinely cares. It is hard.

Any other reason?

To appeal to a lot of younger people. Because I know like in school, our year, we have always been more anti-plastic, more angry about this type of thing than my seniors. Because there are so many people who stand with Greta Thunberg, they kind of need to create a good image to attract more customers.

Anything else?

Perhaps in a few years, I do not know when but maybe when the law is stricter. It would probably be profitable to start now rather than having to change everything – like start a whole new line of production in 2030. So might as well change now for the legal requirement.

8. How does internet access affect the way you access and obtain information about brands and retailers being socially responsible?

I mean because everyone now from the age of 11 all the way up has such easy access to the world. Information travels a lot quicker. So obviously, before – if there was something wrong with the company – I feel like there was nothing you could do. But these days, if some companies do customers wrong – I have seen it so many times – people would say, 'look, correct this or I will take to Twitter', and suddenly they get the help that they need because the world is so connected. You have things fly around in seconds. And now they have the power to ruin businesses forever. So, in a way, that is good. Because now you have to think twice before you do something. Because information flies out so quickly. You have to think twice before you make a decision you know might annoy a lot of people. So anyway, it is good. Of course, that also leaves room for people to make up

rumours or – if they don't like something, they exaggerate it – but I mean taking both things with a pinch of salt. All in all, [it] is good – it does make companies behave properly.

How do you feel about having that power to access information through the internet?

I feel more part of the loop. I almost feel like I am valued as a customer, and it feels like a bit of an open relationship there; there is more transparency. I would say it is a good thing. I feel like I can trust it more rather than all the background stuff going on, and I find out about stuff two months later. What is more transparent is that you can work with numbers instead of manipulated percentages from different news outlets.

How does internet access affect your awareness and knowledge about responsible behaviours among brands and retailers?

A lot, I would say. I don't usually go out to search for it. But I have friends on Instagram who care, and they do go out of their way to find out stuff. And a lot of them would share it on their stories, post about it. So that gives me a lot of awareness about what is going on and if I should look into more. So, I would say in that way, a lot of awareness. I would not be aware of any of it without social media and the internet.

9. What factors contribute to your awareness and knowledge about brands and retailers' socially responsible behaviours?

Friends on social media. Big celebrities or all of those meme pages that have a lot of people following. They tend to also raise my awareness because it shows on my feeds, and so many people kind of in the comments giving out more information or backing up these points. So, many pages that are specifically about them.

Anything else?

News outlets. Even the *Daily Mail* at times would post an article or picture of working conditions in Sri Lanka, for example. I saw it a few months ago. So even things like that, I don't trust it. Take it with a pinch of salt.

Anything else?

A lot of these animal websites. Sometimes they cross their boundaries, but when they release a video, these types of slaughterhouses or these companies are doing this for their animals. The video also – I trust them as well. They also raise my awareness from an

emotional point of view. It is different knowing about animal cruelty and watching a video of it. That would affect me a lot emotionally.

Anything else?

Documentaries. When David Attenborough did his documentaries. We do not know the effects of what we are doing on the jungles. So just seeing those documentaries brings a lot of awareness.

How do you decide or judge the credibility and reliability of those factors?

With celebrities and meme pages, stuff like that is so hard – they might be getting paid to say something. It is very likely with ads. But for example, Instagram had made that new rule like last year where you have to write ‘hashtag ad’ or ‘this is an ad’ if you are being paid. So that also increases the transparency on that end, but if it says ‘hashtag ad’, I would normally not believe it at all. But if it is not paid and has personal opinions, I would believe that slightly more. Also, I think if we were to see something shocking. I would typically google it just to see what other news outlets have to say. If one or two websites posted about it and there is nothing else from the rest of the world, and these are dodgy type websites, then I would not be as convinced as, for example, everyone talking about it all over Twitter, all over many news platforms, stuff like that. So then again, it is more credible if there are a couple of sources.

How about friends posting something on social media or telling you directly about some brands or retailers being socially responsible?

Again, I think typically, when I have this type of conversation with my friends, it is very much like ‘what is your source’? If it is just a thread passing around on Twitter that they found interesting or shocking, I would not listen to it as much as if they found this article, or I saw this picture or this video – and if they send me that, then I would be more convinced. I mean, if it is just a small random thing, I would not pay attention, but if it is something shocking, then yeah.

How do you assess the credibility and reliability of the content on social media?

Typically, if there is something that I don’t trust, I would look at the comments section because people would call them out: ‘this is nonsense, don’t listen to this’, ‘this is the statistic, not that’. Or again, if it seems unbelievable and it is true, and a lot of people would be like ‘yeah, this is actually true’. I do have friends who actually work in the actual section of where this news comes from. So, the comment section on social media

tends to be quite reliable because they tell you what the overall community thinks – whether they think it is exaggerated or whether they think, ‘fair enough, I believe it’. But that is the first thing I look at. Also, the content of their page in general. If they are very opinionated on one side, I would be more careful with them.

How about the credibility and reliability of news in general?

Typically, if they use images. If they have any specific statistics – if they have their sources – if they have a base to the claims.

How about documentaries?

With animals, they have so many pictures online and video. I can trust that. I can see the penguin’s head is stuck in a plastic bottle. I see the picture, so I believe it. I don’t watch too many. I tend to believe David Attenborough’s because I always watch them.

Have you ever thought of who made it to trust it?

If I was that deep into it and found it hard to believe, then I would look into the background of it, looking at who was involved, who scripted it. Some are known with their reputation. If a lot of people watched it, liked it and gave it a good rating, I would not think it is rubbish. I find that as an indicator that it is reliable.

10. Please name factors that influence your trust towards a brand or a retailer who claims to be socially responsible towards the environment and society.

Reputation. The person, the spokesman. What they have done. Saying you are socially responsible and proving it by doing things, giving x pounds to charities or cutting down the emissions – so without that proof, I would not trust.

There is a brand A that has been being socially responsible for years, and there is a brand B that has just started practising socially responsible activities recently. What do you think of these two brands? Would you trust either?

With the one who recently started, it is easier to see change. You can see a change like two different contrasts in terms of work satisfaction, prices, revenues. You can see it through their financial statements – stuff like that. So, it is different from before and now. That is an indicator that, yes, they are definitely doing it. I can trust that they are definitely doing it. While the socially responsible one has always been socially responsible, I don’t know – I guess I have to see what they mean by ‘we have always been socially

responsible'. I might not trust that they have always been doing it because it might not have been brought out – unless it is Lush.

So would you consider the history of being responsible towards the environment and society as something that influences your trust?

The history does not influence my trust because, obviously, we are in the middle of change. And really, when you get on that journey – [it] just does not really matter to me as much. As long as other factors suggest that it is socially responsible, the history of how long they have been doing it does not really impact me that much. The impacts of what they do are more important.

Socially responsible activities can be anything from plastic packaging recycling, carbon emissions, fair-trade and so on. If a brand or a retailer focuses on one aspect versus a brand that works on more than one aspect in terms of being socially responsible, would you trust any of them? Why?

I personally think it is easier to trust the one that is doing and focusing on one thing. Because it is a bit more realistic, and they would probably make a difference. Obviously, multitasking versus doing one thing properly. You only have a limited number of resources to devote to this. If you choose one aspect, it must be the aspect you care about the most – that you feel for the most. I would trust that a little more than I would trust a company that puts resources a little bit in everything.

Appendix G. Example of the text search query used to search for repetition of familiar phrases, including the word ‘salt’ in NVivo

The screenshot shows the NVivo Text Search Query interface. The search criteria are set to 'Selected Items...' with the search term 'salt'. The search options are set to 'Special'. The results table shows 13 references across 9 sources.

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
M005	Files\\Interview transcripts	2	0.04%
M007	Files\\Interview transcripts	2	0.05%
M009	Files\\Interview transcripts	1	0.02%
M013	Files\\Interview transcripts	1	0.03%
M024	Files\\Interview transcripts	3	0.07%
M026	Files\\Interview transcripts	1	0.04%
M029	Files\\Interview transcripts	1	0.02%
M031	Files\\Interview transcripts	1	0.01%
M032	Files\\Interview transcripts	1	0.02%

When looking for repetition and similarities within the data set, the researcher recognised that some participants used the phrase ‘*take it with a pinch/grain of salt*’ through conducting, reading and transcribing all the interviews. Some participants repeatedly mentioned this phrase. Hence, the researcher did a search query of the word ‘salt’ across all interview transcripts, and the result was 13 references from nine sources. This query was saved to the project as a ‘trust issue’ under the Query results tool in NVivo. It made it easier to refer to the significant data and then code them (with more context rather than just the phrase) into the relevant node(s) later. The code that contains data about trusting the information with a pinch of salt was later coded into a child node/sub-theme under themes 2 and 3. By doing this text search query, the researcher also identified the similarities between participants regarding their trust towards information about brands and retailers’ socially responsible activities.

Appendix H. Example of the text search query used to search for repetition of the word ‘size’ in NVivo

The screenshot shows the NVivo Text Search Criteria dialog box. The search term is 'size'. The search criteria are set to 'Special'. The search results are displayed in a table below the dialog box.

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	4	0.08%
M007	Files\Interview transcripts	1	0.03%
M009	Files\Interview transcripts	1	0.02%
M013	Files\Interview transcripts	2	0.07%
M014	Files\Interview transcripts	1	0.03%
M017	Files\Interview transcripts	2	0.09%
M018	Files\Interview transcripts	3	0.06%
M019	Files\Interview transcripts	1	0.04%
M022	Files\Interview transcripts	1	0.02%
M023	Files\Interview transcripts	2	0.05%
M028	Files\Interview transcripts	1	0.03%
M031	Files\Interview transcripts	4	0.06%
M032	Files\Interview transcripts	2	0.03%
M034	Files\Interview transcripts	1	0.02%

A similar text search was carried out as the researcher noticed that some participants kept mentioning the size of the business or brand. The result gave 26 references from 14 sources. The search result was also saved under the text search Query results tool for reflection and coding later. The results were saved and coded to relevant node.

Appendix I. Examples of ‘see also the data can be found in’ another source or another part of the text within the same document

See Also Links			
From Name	From Folder	To Name	To Folder
M001	Files\Interview transcripts	M006	Files\Interview transcripts
M001	Files\Interview transcripts	M004	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M001	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M006	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M029	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M029	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M009	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M013	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M018	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M020	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M022	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M023	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M029	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M031	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M033	Files\Interview transcripts
M006	Files\Interview transcripts	M034	Files\Interview transcripts
M027	Files\Interview transcripts	B corps	Externals
M027	Files\Interview transcripts	M027	Files\Interview transcripts
M027	Files\Interview transcripts	M027	Files\Interview transcripts
M031	Files\Interview transcripts	Good on you app and web	Externals
M031	Files\Interview transcripts	Good on you app and web	Externals
M031	Files\Interview transcripts	M031	Files\Interview transcripts
M034	Files\Interview transcripts	M034	Files\Interview transcripts

Related data regarding the size of the brand or the retailer and their scale of socially responsible initiatives which can influence trust.

Appendix J. Inductively emerging codes

<p><i>'I think we have another problem. The overuse of plastic is a cheap and easy solution to make foods large scale. It is a lazy solution because obviously [it is] completely unsustainable. It makes people's lives easier because people just have to take their food – they don't have to prepare. So, no wonder the problem is two-fold. One is making everything large scale, which will involve some kind of packaging to keep things separate. You also have a problem of choosing a solution which is easy – plastic'. (#M006)</i></p>	<p>Plastic is not the only problem</p>
<p><i>'If they talked about packaging, I prefer they invest less in packaging and invest more in families who are making the clothes and not use child labour. They try to make us forget about the child labour issue by doing other things such as packaging. I think it is not good to stop plastic completely. I don't think it is important. We have more important battles to fight than that. If the plastic bags end up in the street because of us, consumers and customers, it is not the companies that have to make [an] effort'. (#M008)</i></p>	
<p><i>'At the same time there are people who don't really care or never care so, therefore, they will continue to buy products from places that don't make changes because that's what they do and that's what they've always done ... it becomes so normal, and it is embedded in our society – something we cannot live without – so it is harder for people to adapt to not having that because they are used to [it]'. (#M009)</i></p>	<p>Public knowledge and behaviour</p>
<p><i>'I think the issue then lies in public education and that people do not understand what can be recycled, what cannot'. (#M013)</i></p>	
<p><i>'I am sure they can invest into something that can be recycled but also sturdy and not going to break. They have the resources and money for that, but they don't want to do that. ... Supermarkets want cheap stuff, doing it like the zero-waste shop can be seen as more costly, and it means that they make less profit. Maybe that's the reason why they don't even want to do that'. (#M016)</i></p>	<p>Reason for not being socially responsible (yet)</p>
<p><i>'It is very hard to change to something else where cheap plastic packaging is like the core component of a business model. That is how you can cut your cost and stay competitive and actually make more money. It is very difficult to entirely shift away from plastic ... it is hard to turn around. A lot of change has to be done'. (#M018)</i></p>	

Appendix K. Causal explanations associated with profit-based interest

<p><i>‘I feel like some brands are doing it just because everyone is doing it, so they feel like they have to do it...’ (#M015)</i></p> <p><i>‘I think when they see other brands do it. They see that they are in good light – and brands that brought people attention. They want their business to be shed in that light’. (#M017)</i></p>	<p>Trend</p>
<p><i>‘I think they are doing it because they know that that’s how businesses are moving now. So they also need to move to that direction to stay competitive...’ (#M014)</i></p> <p><i>‘I think they are doing it because that what the competitors are doing. So if they see the competitor is doing well by taking this approach, that is probably the direction they want to go, too...’ (#M025)</i></p>	<p>Competition</p>
<p><i>‘To some extent, they often make that very visible because it would attract people and clients. Nowadays, people want to see brands being aware of the issues and taking serious measures ... – in order to continue to grow and not lose their customers, they will make efforts ... – one thing for sure is the customers’. (#M006)</i></p> <p><i>‘Just for them to look more desirable for consumers. I feel like consumers are more socially aware. You can see global warming; wildlife is being affected by plastic. So I feel like for companies seeing things like that, they might try to seem more appealing for customer satisfaction...’ (#M035)</i></p>	<p>Consumers</p>
<p><i>‘Big companies say ‘oh we are doing this trying to save this and that’ so then they don’t get blasted in the media’. (#M022)</i></p> <p><i>‘They might just do [it] to get good media or be out of this perception of not doing anything. It might be a show’. (#M024)</i></p>	<p>Media pressure</p>
<p><i>‘Or just to bypass regulations or new law set by the government’. (#M020)</i></p> <p><i>‘...regulations that they have to bypass. Because you cannot just be a bad company, even if you do not care about the consumer’s opinion – you cannot just not follow the law’. (#M035)</i></p>	<p>Legislative/ regulatory pressure</p>

Appendix L. Causal explanations associated with profit-based interest

<p><i>‘Or it may be cheaper for them to make it with less plastic packaging’. (#M033)</i></p> <p><i>‘I think they only do it if it is never going to hurt a profit. So smaller packaging can actually improve their profits because they are not wasting that much packaging...’ (#M007)</i></p>	<p>Cost/money-saving</p>
<p><i>‘I think they are genuine to a certain extent because they realise what the issue is ... It is impacting the environment ... natural resources. What we have on the planet is what we have on the planet. We haven’t really the capability to move off the planet. That’s the reason why companies realise that ‘hang on, we need to be more responsible with what we have got’ ... Look at it long-term, everyone needs to make money for as long as possible. But they have to realise that at this current consumption that will not be possible. ... they have to consume in an ethical manner that allows them to make as much money as they can. They did not think about the long run in the beginning; they just thought of a financial boom – make as much money as you can. Now they realise they cannot do that. Resources are limited...’ (#M018)</i></p> <p><i>‘I feel like some people might actually realise that they are damaging the environment. So, some might have just realised that. ‘Maybe we should not be packing or using that much in our shipping that much’. Maybe some companies just understand that idea. Because right now, it is such a big deal, and it is affecting everyone. Companies may realise that it is not just affecting consumers, but it is also affecting them if the environment reaches the point where say, workers cannot work in the environment they work in anymore. So, I feel like once they realise that it is not just affecting consumers but themselves as well, not just business-wise but in terms of the manufacturing in terms of making the products, then I feel like they would be more socially responsible in what they do’. (#M034)</i></p>	<p>Sustainability</p>
<p><i>‘I think it is the brand name. People nowadays are conscious of the environment. And in order to protect their customer base and reputation, they need to show the public that they are doing something’. (#M013)</i></p>	<p>Brand image and reputation</p>

Appendix M. Non-brand/retailer-controlled sources that contribute to Gen Z's knowledge and awareness of brands and retailers' socially responsible initiatives

<p><i>'Normally, media but multiple types of media. So, not just one report. Let's say I read it on The Times, but I take reports from the BBC, ABC and – just from general comparison – just to see what the general outlook is ... The Times every now and then would have an article about it – about some sort of environmental thing'. (#M013)</i></p>	<p>News and articles (n=30 or 86%)</p>
<p><i>'BBC News, The Guardian and stuff – and when you click on links like that, you have a look at the news from the retailers and what they are doing'. (#M016)</i></p>	
<p><i>'... and the only reason I was aware of it before is because my family is quite concerned about it...'. (#M022)</i></p>	<p>Friends and family (n=21 or 60%)</p>
<p><i>'... my family is a bit influential – they are quite conscious about this kind of thing, so we do take steps at home ... Friends who share stuff with me...'. (#M032)</i></p>	
<p><i>'... usually read reviews, for example, products I am buying – I would look at the website, and I would read reviews about it. So, what other people have to say about it ... People around me. So, if it is something they are conscious – they talk about – then I am going to be more inclined to research whatever. I'd also say the level of exposure I have to it'. (#M009)</i></p>	<p>Other consumers/ People (n=15 or 43%)</p>
<p><i>'Word of mouth is a good start because you can kind of trust the person, but then you kind of want to do your own research to convince yourself...'. (#M018)</i></p>	
<p><i>'Mainstream media. I am not always looking for all the details – I think it is just – I am conscious about it because I see it on proper media outlets'. (#M006)</i></p>	<p>TV and streaming services (n=11 or 31%)</p>
<p><i>'TV, news, social media, posters, billboards, staff people, through someone like saying 'oh they are doing this cool thing' and you learn more about it'. (#M011)</i></p>	
<p><i>'Even with clothes, I would look at where is it made. Just to see where they come from ... I kind of go to physical stores to see the physical size of it – understand if the workers are happy. Sport Direct had this massive court case with their workers – [they] wouldn't get paid for working overtime. And also, when you walk into a shop, you know if people are happy...'. (#M007)</i></p>	<p>Personal experiences (n=7 or 20%)</p>
<p><i>'My personal opinion as well – me buying from those brands. ... I used to see how they overpack stuff. So, I tend to stop buying stuff. If I do buy from brands, I tend to buy in-store because it is less packaging and less plastic. So, from my personal experience buying from those</i></p>	

<i>brands and how I process it in my head and think maybe I should not buy from them because they use too much plastic’. (#M034)</i>	
<i>‘Education. In school, we talked about, like, reuse, recycle stuff – that is a good thing – that kind of stuff. I was taught that if companies are not doing it or misusing resources, then it is a bad thing. I was just taught that ... but education is the main factor that shapes my opinion on this, on how companies are socially responsible’. (#M026)</i>	School/ University (n=7 or 20%)
<i>‘I think when I was in school, I had this one teacher who cares a lot about the environment. ... So my point is teachers in school, education at school is a big aspect ... Even though the internet, YouTube and Instagram are great ways to dive deeper into a subject, the initial exposure children get, you know, people our age is through schools’. (#M029)</i>	
<i>‘I kind of go to physical stores to see the physical size of it, understand if the workers are happy. Sport Direct had this massive court case with their workers – [they] would not get paid for working overtime. And also, when you walk into a shop, you know if people are happy. Generally, when I walk into a shop, and I see people are happy working, having a chat, versus if they are stressed, then ... I know they are in a stressful environment. That is never good’. (#M007)</i>	Employees (n=6 or 17%)
<i>‘Big talking point, after David Attenborough did his Blue Planet and plastic on that – everyone watches David Attenborough. So, after that came out, there was a lot of talk, particularly in my generation’. (#M022)</i>	Documentaries (n=6 or 17%)
<i>‘Documentaries. When David Attenborough did his documentaries. We do not know the effects of what we are doing on the jungles. So just seeing those documentaries brings a lot of awareness’. (#M024)</i>	
<i>‘Charities, they try to promote this stuff, so they are more in conservation with the society’. (#M027)</i>	NPOs (n=3 or 8%)
<i>‘I think you just have to do the research really and just kind of look at their tracked history. For example, a brand that I trust and a brand that I used to work for was Lush. I think in terms of being socially responsible, they are probably one of the brands that are so aware of, you know, being socially responsible...’ (#M003)</i>	Workplace (n=2 or 6%)

Some standard bigger, reliable news outlets were mentioned, such as BBC News, ABC News and *The Economist*, to name just a few. According to the participants interviewed, these are the mainstream and major news outlets they would use to obtain information about brands and retailers’ socially responsible initiatives. Some mentioned that they would read the articles when they searched for this topic.

Now TV is a streaming service that requires users to have an internet connection and device to watch films, TV shows and sports (Now TV, n.d.). Similarly, Netflix is also a streaming service that requires users to have internet-connected devices to watch TV programs, movies and documentaries without adverts (Netflix, n.d.). With the BBC, users are required to sign into their BBC account, which necessitates an internet connection to watch live and on-demand TV and use streaming services on the BBC website (BBC, 2020). These details demonstrate that an internet connection significantly impacts how Gen Z individuals obtain information regarding the socially responsible behaviours among brands and retailers.

Some participants mentioned documentaries as a factor that contributes to their awareness and knowledge of socially responsible initiatives. Some particularly mentioned Sir David Attenborough, one of the most popular public figures in Britain (Smith, 2018). His documentaries show how plastic affects wildlife, specifically animals (Shukman, 2019).

Appendix N. Information type and credibility

<p><i>'I think based on the whole of – if I researched a company, I would look at their website, look at articles – also read a few reviews. I think the review gives you slightly honest opinions. Not social media reviews but Google reviews to see what they say about the company. So, I think I would look at a few things'. (#M014)</i></p>	<p>Personal experiences, opinions, reviews (n=20)</p>
<p><i>'If it is a bigger brand, I try to educate myself about it. I usually do a bit of research, type in Google but try not to take someone's words for it. I try to look for articles and stuff'. (#M031)</i></p>	<p>Own research (n=14)</p>
<p><i>'The media is very influential. Again, part of that social conformity people tend to believe in. If the media tends to show statistics or what is happening with those brands, I tend to somewhat believe it, especially if it comes from big sources like the BBC or Sky News or ITV – you know, these big media outlets. I tend to look up articles to see what they are talking about. Again, they are showing the information that is affecting us. If it is something important everyone needs to know, they will show and they will tell people and companies can get a lot of media coverage. [The] media factor is very important in terms of building my opinion of that brand'. (#M032)</i></p>	<p>Trusted media and news (n=14)</p>
<p><i>'It would be my friends and seeing their thoughts about it as well. If a lot of people do say, 'Oh, I feel like this brand is very much socially responsible on how they are consciously aware of their plastic use and stuff', then I tend to be more conformed to the idea because I realise it is not just me thinking like that – it is them as well'. (#M034)</i></p>	<p>Friends and family (n=6)</p>
<p><i>'If I want to check if they are socially responsible, I go to a group like a union that monitors how companies are performing and rate how ethical they are, stuff like that ... They are external and not part of the company. They will rate how ethical they are, their procedures and stuff, they will investigate and write a report on it and everything ... NGO is the good place to go'. (#M020)</i></p>	<p>Non-profit organisations (n=3)</p>